Clare felt even more desperate He didn't understand—nice though he was. How could she make him realize that it wasn't a question of strength of mind. With her it would need courage to say "yes", to take sex when it was offered

"I'm sorry!" she said. "I wish . . ."

"Yes?"

"Oh, I don't know what it is I do want. I'm too mixed up"

"I guess that broken engagement has upset you. It'll sort itself in time. Do you still love the guy?"

"No!"

He was surprised at her vehemence Whoever he was, this Robin must have given her a pretty bad knock.

Clare threw her cigarette out of the car window. She felt sad and unsettled. The day had been such fun and she'd been so happy Why must it end like this?

As if sensing her mood Ham put his arm round her shoulder and ruffled her hair.

"You're a sweet baby, Clare. Wouldn't seem hard to me to fall in love with you. Perhaps it's just as well I shan't get the chance to see too much of you."

"I like you, too," Clare said childishly. "I'm sorry, Ham—sorry if I am a disappointment Maybe if we did go on seeing each other, I'd change and want things the way you do. But it wouldn't be fair to promise anything."

"Listen, honey," he broke in. "Do you really think you could grow fond of me? I know this is going against my own rules but if there's a chance with you—I'd like to know about it. I can always find a way of seeing you. We often swop around the rota to fix in with our dates I'm never going to pretend with you—it's too important. As I've explained, I don't want to be too responsible But if you think you might get to loving me—I'll hang around But I'm not pretending I can keep up a platonic friendship indefinitely. Guess I'm just not made that way—certainly with a girl who stirs me up the way you do. Just looking at you is enough to make me want you real bad. I felt it last night. It's a kind of electric sex-spark you give off that makes me crazy for wanting you without so much as a touch from your hands. I've never had it so bad with a girl before—that's why I say I'll be glad to stick around. But you've got to be honest with *me*, Clare honey—tell me if there's a chance for me."

Had Clare liked him less she might have temporized She didn't want to lose him now that they had met. Ham was so exactly what she needed at this moment when the loss of Robin had left her feeling as though she was suspended in mid-air She wished in a queer way she could tell Pip about the "new-boy-friend". She wished—in a way—she might show the whole world she wasn't grieving over her broken engagement

But she felt that Hamilton Craig was too nice, too genuine to be "used". He'd wait for her if she so much as hinted that she might sleep with him. She couldn't do that There were many things she wanted from this man; companionship, comfort, a *raison d'être*; but not sex

"I can't promise!" she said in a small, lost little voice "I don't think it could ever come to what *you* want, Ham. I'm sorry—sorry for myself, too"

(Sorriest of all for herself)

"It's a pity!" Ham said with real regret. "I think we'd have had a lot of fun together."

"But I don't want *that* kind of fun," Clare said wearily.

He raised his eyebrows

"You don't know what it could be like, Baby. But I respect you even while I think you're letting life pass you by There's a war on, you know We might all be dead this time next week. It isn't as if you've got time to wait for the right guy to come along. I'll envy him. But say—were you never tempted to sleep with this ex fiancé of yours?"

"No! I loved him—at least, I thought so. But—well, when it came to the test I just didn't want him."

"So that was what you meant by 'incompatibility'" Ham shrugged his shoulders "You must have come pretty near to giving yourself to him, I reckon it was quite a shock to him when you turned him down."

"I suppose so His pride was hurt But he offended me and my pride, too, you see"

The American gave her a long, curious glance He had been warned that English girls were cold before he left the States Experience had disproved the facts. Most of the fellows in his squadron were set up with regular girls in the village down here in Sussex, and without much trouble, either! Some of them even brought their girls into camp.

Although it was against the rules, the C.O. turned a blind eye so long as they were out by morning.

But Ham was sufficiently astute to realise that there was quite a difference between "that kind of girl" and Clare. She was so much more distinguished. A real lady. Maybe this explained her reticence. But he remained positive that the reluctance was all in her mind and nothing to do with that gorgeous body of hers.

"Clare, you're quite sure it can't come to anything?" he tried again. "I'm not just out for a good time, honey. I like you a lot. I think it might grow into something much more if you'd let it."

She wanted to love—and be loved—wanted it so much that she weakened and let him draw her back into his arms. Gradually she relaxed and thawed and returned his kisses more passionately. She did not even draw away when his hand felt beneath her thick tweed coat for her breasts. But as he began to caress her more excitedly her own tender, grateful ardour cooled. A warning sounded somewhere far back in her mind. It wouldn't stop here—soon Hamilton would be wanting more—soon the pleasant caressing voice would grow harsh with desire. He would desire her body—his own firm man's body hardening—growing fiercer—more relentless.

"No!" she drew away, hostile and breathless. "I'm sorry—sorry, Ham. I just *can't.*"

What a girl! he thought as his breathing slowly steadied and his body cooled. To be able to do this to him with no more than a kiss and a touch.

He glanced at her curiously. Wasn't she herself feeling at all unsatisfied? No. Strange, virginal girl—she sat there beside him, unmoved—even sad with her tense white face and nervous hands.

"Don't worry. I'm okay," he told her, wanting to see the smile come back to her really beautiful eyes.

"Can we go home now?" she asked, straightening her skirt.

He nodded.

"You'll let me take you out to dinner, won't you, honey?"

"I don't think so. I have to go up to Town very early tomorrow. I'm on duty at nine o'clock so I have to get the milk-train."

He was disappointed but not surprised Whatever it was between them hadn't set her alight as it had him. Maybe she was right to call it a day. It would be too easy for him to fall seriously for Clare He didn't want to be tied—not in war-time and away from his own country. That sort of affair wouldn't last.

"Then we'll say good-bye, honey," he frowned as he spoke, and tipped a couple of cigarettes out of a packet

When he dropped her back at the farm he refused to go in for a drink She stood outside in the cold blue dusk for a moment, watching his car disappear through the farm gates. She knew she wouldn't see Ham Craig again He wouldn't come back She felt almost as deep a sense of loss and frustration as she had done when Robin went away.

Must her associations with men all end this way? *Was it her fault?* Why must she feel so cut off, so incomplete, so apart from the rest of the gay, mad world?

Her sense of utter loneliness was worse than ever when finally she said good-bye to her parents and returned to London

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT WAS the first day of March when Clare returned to duty at the hospital On this fine and cold morning she should have felt brisk and cheerful, but as one or two of the other V A D s remarked the moment they saw her, she had dark shadows under her eyes and certainly did not look as though she had just had a holiday

It was exactly what Aunt Hilda and her cousin Pip said, too. Aunt Hilda had been disappointed

"A week at the farm should have done you a lot of good I do hope you aren't fretting over your broken engagement"

"No, of course not!" Clare had answered. She had no intention of telling Aunt Hilda just why the week had done her no good First there had of course been the reaction

LADY CHATTERLEY'S DAUGHTER

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by

PATRICIA ROBINS

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Any similarity or apparent connection between the characters in this story and actual persons, whether alive or dead, is purely coincidental.

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PART I

CHAPTER ONE

THE HIT-AND-RUN raids over London were becoming more frequent. The sirens were now sounding every evening as soon as it was dark. They sounded that evening just before Clare was due to go off duty. Following the usual drill, she stayed in the ward making sure the black-out curtains were closely drawn, moving from bed to bed to see if the patients were all right, and in particular, stayed awhile and gave what strength and comfort she could to any man who was particularly ill, or had just had an operation.

Sister Evans—sister-in-charge of the ward—an acidulated woman with a sharp tongue, known to the men as poor old "Effing-Evans" was busy with a junior nurse behind some screens. Just as the warning sounded one of the young officers had haemorrhaged.

Clare was at her best in a crisis. The officers in this ward were accustomed to the sight of the calm, lovely girl who walked so quietly and with such dignity among them She brought with her a subtle quality of peace and security which were fine attributes and soothing to those with hideous wounds and war-jangled nerves. She was a model of neatness which even Sister Evans could not criticize, cool and fresh-looking in her white starched apron and the cap that showed only a faint fringe of wonderful red-gold hair which was long and which she wore coiled in a neat bun.

Her figure was perfect and her colouring—the red hair, milk-white skin and very blue large eyes—made her very

striking Men who first looked into Clare's eyes found them disarmingly soft and mistakenly imagined that they held an invitation. But it was not the kind of invitation they wanted that Clare ever gave. She was friendly. She liked the companionship of men and had made one or two very good friends in the hospital. She was a beautiful dancer and could be fun at a party But there was always an invisible barrier between herself and the opposite sex and men very quickly came up against it, and left her alone. They didn't understand her coldness. She knew that. Nervously exhausted men, weary of war and bloodshed, liked their girls uncomplicated and easy yielding. She could only allow a certain degree of intimacy before there came a sudden curious jolt to her feelings It was as though she entered a dark and frightening tunnel at the end of which outrage rather than passionate satisfaction waited for her.

She was engaged to Robin Claye—a young officer now fighting in Tripoli. She had been able to get closer to him than to most of the boys who tried to make love to her because he seemed to understand and appreciate the quality of reserve in her. He respected her modesty. He had never asked for more than she considered it right for a girl to give before marriage

She lived outside the hospital, with Aunt Hilda—her mother's only sister, in her flat near Sloane Square

Clare's home, Swanningdean Farm, was five miles out of Brighton under the shadow of the Sussex Downs It was usually peaceful there and lovely. She used to be devoted to both home and parents when she was very small But it wasn't like that now. There weren't often rows—open hostility—but undercurrents of dissension and misunderstandings which were turning Clare against her parents and making her less inclined to go home on leave Aunt Hilda seemed to understand her much better than her mother did She had been glad when war broke out that she was just old enough to be a V A.D. and come up to London and share the flat with Aunt Hilda and her cousin Philippa. Pip wasn't her sort—the exact opposite, in fact—but easy to get on with. Clare didn't see much of her because Pip had a secretarial job in the War Office and was a gay, sunny-tempered girl nearly always out on some party in the evenings

For the last two years—since she was eighteen—Clare had

given herself wholly to her work as a V.A.D., all except the part of her heart and mind which belonged to Robin She was going to marry Robin Claye at the end of next week when he was due home on leave.

She was nice to all the patients whether she liked them or not She felt that it was her duty to be impersonal in this work. If she had a favourite at all it was Captain Talbot who occupied the first bed, beside which she lingered a few moments

His pillows looked hot and rumpled, she turned them He had a haggard, lean face, grey from the effects of a long spell of septicaemia—a post-operative drawn and hollow look. He was one of the oldest men here—nearly twenty-eight and due for his majority On the locker beside him stood a photograph of a very pretty girl in Wren uniform—his fiancée, who had been posted to Gibraltar just before the Tripoli campaign in which Colin Talbot had been wounded.

Clare knew a certain amount about the background and histories of all these men whom she nursed daily Colin, for instance, had been reading Classics at Oxford when the war claimed him Few people visited him because he had no mother and his father, a regular and rather high-ranking officer, was in Burma Clare admired Colin because he never complained and his rather bitter, dogged courage was far more emotionally moving than anything else in the world.

She liked him, too, because he never made a pass at her as the others were inclined to do When there was time, they talked about books, poetry and music, which they both enjoyed. She knew that he wanted, when the war was over, to go on to the production side of Drama. He was particularly interested in Shakespeare.

She asked him now if he would like a drink.

"I'd rather have a cigarette," he said

She lit one for him. He put it between his lips, smiling his thanks.

"Sister says you smoke too much," she said.

"Sister says a lot of things but I'm afraid I don't take any notice."

"Well, kindly listen to me, Captain Talbot. This chain-smoking is very bad for your nerves."

He grinned.

"Haven't got any. How are you today? You haven't said one word to me."

"Too busy. Have you had your usual letter?"

He turned his glance with deep affection on the gay sweet face of his Wren.

"I have. And *you*?"

"Of course Robin'll be home next week."

"For the Great Day."

Before she could answer they heard a bomb drop not far from the hospital. Windows and doors rattled. Somebody swore

Colin Talbot looked at the young V.A.D. thoughtfully. She had barely flickered an eyelash. He thought:

> She's a real Florence Nightingale type—cool as a cucumber. Or perhaps she's as scared as I am and the indifference is a façade. Girls like these nurses and my Eve make one immensely proud of the women of this country They behave magnificently. There goes another stick of bombs—closer this time. How damnably impotent one feels lying here unable to hit back Don't think about it. Think about this girl—that red hair and those eyes are most attractive, mysterious, too. I'm never sure what she's thinking—she's quite an interesting character . . .

The man in the bed next to Colin was in a drugged sleep and cared nothing for the raid or the bombing. The sound of the anti-aircraft gun-fire was growing heavier. The next bomb dropped even closer.

Clare came to the bedside of a boy known as Tubby Benson His right arm had been blown off at the shoulder. Rugger had been the big thing in his life. He was a 'Varsity Blue. Clare felt maternal towards him and was desperately sorry about his arm. Tubby talked of nothing but the one they were making for him now and what he was going to do with it. He was an inveterate joker and tried Sister Evans' patience sorely. He played all kinds of practical jokes on her.

"Hello, nurse," he greeted the V.A.D. "Come to hold my hand?"

"As if I hadn't got something better to do," she smiled.

"Nothing could be better than holding my one and only

hand . . ." and he held it out to her, his long-lashed eyes appealing.

She took his hand and smiled down at him.

"Sorry I haven't time to stay and chat, Tubby."

"Now that *would* be a treat"

She rearranged his rumpled bedclothes and brushed some ash off the sheets.

"A little bird tells me that you'll be fussing over a tall, handsome husband next week"

She coloured but laughed, and walked on.

He chuckled and followed the neat figure with his gaze.

She's a bit of a pet is our Mellors. Some of the chaps think she's starchy but I know she isn't. She was jolly sweet to me when I was coming out of the anaesthetic after my op. I'm mad about the colour of her hair. They say redheads are hot stuff. I wonder if she is? Blast this bloody right arm Good for nothing. Not much good trying to make a bid for the beautiful Clare with only one arm to hold her. Besides, she's fully occupied. I envy her chap. Yet I don't. Even when she's being very sweet and having a bit of a joke she kind of wards a fellow off. Not like that physiotherapist who expects reactions from every touch—and gets one!

A fretful voice from the other side of the ward called: "*Nurse! Nurse!*"

Clare walked over to the man who was calling her A tall, gaunt Second-Lieutenant, he had come up from the ranks just before he was wounded; a boastful type with an inferiority complex, and a meek little wife whom he nagged from the moment she arrived in the ward till the moment she left. Nobody much liked Mr Fuller although Clare tried not to make any distinction

He gave her rather a huffy look and growled:

"It's time for my tablets—long past."

She glanced at the little gold watch pinned to her bib. Robin had given it to her as an engagement present.

"Only just time, Mr Fuller."

"Well, don't let's have an argument about it," he said hastily.

She said nothing. She was used to his bad temper. She

brought him a glass of water and stood beside him while he took the tablets. He watched her sullenly.

> Who does she think she is? So la-di-da. I'm sick of these lady-nurses who think themselves Angels of Mercy. The only reason they come to a hospital like this is to get a man I'd like to have her in my bed and show her what's what and see if she doesn't like it, too—pretending to be so uppish, and goody-goody.

Clare moved on. Now she was picking up a book that had dropped beside the man she liked least in this ward, even less than she liked Mr. Fuller.

Captain Binelli had Italian blood in him. His mother was English and he had been born and brought up in London. His father ran a big restaurant in the West End—one of the smart successful ones. He was a naturalized Englishman and had not joined the fate of so many of his fellow restaurateurs who had been sent out to Canada or interned in the Isle of Man.

They called Captain Binelli "Cas", short for Casandra, a nickname that he had apparently won because he fancied himself as a lady-killer. His black hair was plastered like black satin over his skull He had a neat little dark moustache and wore bright-coloured expensive silk pyjamas. He seemed to be very rich and talked about the Mercedes-Benz he ran At visiting hours there were always one or two pretty girls to see him. Women and sex were his favourite topics. He was the type that didn't get on with a thoughtful bookworm like Colin Talbot on the other side of the ward. A lot of the fellows found him good fun and enjoyed the drinks and cigars he supplied—along with the tit-bits that his father sent from the restaurant

Clare didn't mind the harmless flirtation in boys like Tubby. But it was different with Binelli. He barely troubled to conceal the fact that he wanted to go to bed with her; whenever he got the chance, he inferred it by gestures or actions which made her cheeks burn She supposed she hadn't the technique to deal with men like Binelli Pip would have managed him. Clare felt annoyed with herself because she could never really handle a situation in which her sex instincts became involved. With Cas Binelli her main

instinct was to shiver away from him as from a good-looking snake.

As she handed him the book he took it but managed to catch hold of her fingers and press them.

"Thank you, darling."

"I've asked you before not to call me 'darling'."

"You're so luscious I could eat you," he whispered, unperturbed by the cold disapproval in her eyes.

"Please let go of my hand, Captain Binelli."

"Won't you ever call me Cas?"

"No "

Another bomb fell. Sister Evans came from behind the screen followed by a junior nurse carrying bowls and towels.

"Sister will see you holding my hand. Kindly let me go," whispered Clare crossly.

Cas sighed. He wore a little medal around his neck. It dangled among the black hairs on his chest and somehow she found it revolting. He spoke in a low whisper only she could hear.

"When are you going to realize what it means for a man to lie and think about a woman and want her as I want you—beautiful, beautiful Clare "

She started to protest, her face flushed with embarrassment. He gave a little jerk that pulled her down so that his lips brushed her ear

"You're going to be married next week, aren't you? Will you be more forthcoming with him than you are with me?"

"You disgust me!" she exclaimed, snatching her hand away

He lay back on his pillow, laughing softly and following her with his amorous gaze as she hurried towards Sister Evans. "Effing-Evans" looked as sour as a pickle that had "gone off", he thought.

It's bloody good fun to watch the little V A D. blush as though I'd put a hand inside her bib I only wish I could. She's got beautiful little breasts What a "lay" she'll be I bet she'll lose that chaste-as-the-snows-on-Etna look when the husband gets busy. Lucky chap. I can imagine what her skin is like. Those redheads have such white bodies I'll lay a hundred-to-one once she's roused she'll be fun.

The ward sister had a few short sharp words for Clare. "I watched you playing up to Captain Binelli. I'll not have that sort of behaviour."

"I assure you I did nothing of the sort, Sister," exclaimed Clare indignantly. "On the contrary, I was going to complain of *his* behaviour towards *me*."

That annoyed Miss Evans who had never had to complain about the behaviour of any man. But she said no more because the "All Clear" was sounding and there was work to be done. And on the whole, she trusted Mellors. Jealous though she was of the girl's obvious attraction, nobody could call Nurse Mellors flirtatious like so many of the V.A.D.s, whom Sister Evans loathed with all the bitterness of a plain woman who has never been loved

Clare felt more than ordinarily relieved tonight when she was able to leave the hospital and walk to the Underground.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN SHE let herself into her aunt's flat she found a message on the telephone pad, written by Aunt Hilda, who worked in the W.V.S. and was always out until late.

> Robin phoned to say he's flown home unexpectedly. He'll be here in time to take you out to dinner I told him I'd give him Pip's bed as she's staying with friends tonight I shan't be back till late. Enjoy yourselves.

Clare's spirits soared. Robin back! She was going to see him tonight. He had come home days before he was expected How wonderful!

Aunt Hilda must have come in an hour ago, written this note and gone out again. That meant Robin might turn up at any moment.

Clare felt wildly happy. She rushed to take off her clothes and plunge into a bath. She could even put up with the

fact that owing to fuel economies the water was not very hot She was in and out of the bath quickly, dusted herself with powder, dabbed perfume behind her ears, and put on a black dress. She pinned the reddish-gold hair high up on her head in the way Robin liked it. Her mood of exhilaration had given way to a momentary shyness at the thought of getting to know her future husband again after their separation

As she waited for Robin to come, she turned on fire and lights in the sitting-room, then she re-read Robin's last letter.

> I do love you, Clare. Thank God you're different from other girls. One of the chaps here is continually boasting because all his girl friends are willing to sleep with him. It doesn't seem to occur to him that they might be just as ready to sleep with someone else, too! I'm glad you're not like that.

Clare's heart was warmed by that paragraph. He was so right, she knew it Some of the nurses with whom she associated, and school friends now in the Services, had already gone to bed with boy friends and seemed proud of it. But she and Robin agreed on a conventional way of life.

She shut her eyes and in warm reflective mood tried to imagine Robin sitting here beside her, his hands gently caressing her hair and neck She allowed these thoughts to go further. As in her imagination his kisses grew more passionate, her cheeks burned She sat up and frowned. She felt hot and uncomfortable—almost apprehensive

Then the doorbell rang. She sprang to her feet and ran to open the door. Robin stood there; fair, slight, good-looking, smiling at her with eager eyes. She rushed into his arms. In the hall they hugged and kissed each other for a long time. Clare's shyness fell away and she felt absolute happiness, a new fervour born of excitement and pleasure after the long separation, and the constant anxiety of not having known when—if ever—she would see him again.

She led her fiancé to the sofa in the sitting-room, fussed over him, brought him drinks and a cigarette, then sat on a hassock at his knee. She looked at him dreamily while his hand ran over her hair and down the nape of her neck in the old tender, familiar way.

He hadn't changed. He was the same Robin with his clean boyish look and charming manners His battle-dress certainly didn't look as if he's just travelled over 1,500 miles in it. This was typical of Robin. One never associated him with untidy clothes—or untidy principles.

He looked at her with adoring eyes.

"I don't think you've got any idea how gorgeous you are, Clare," he said. "You're looking more beautiful than ever. I hope those chaps you're nursing have remembered you're engaged to *me!*"

"Don't worry, I keep them at arm's length!" Clare smiled back at him. "Not that they don't all try to make a pass—all except Colin Talbot."

"Talbot? Who is he?"

"Oh, darling, just one of the wounded officers I'm nursing. He has a nasty septic leg wound and it's taking a long time to heal He's years older than you anyway, he's madly in love with a very attractive Wren called Evelyn."

"You seem to know a lot about him!" Robin countered.

"Only because we happen to talk now and then. Actually, he's the sort of man I'd like to have had for a father."

Robin looked at Clare curiously.

"I know that you don't like your father much—or your mother, come to that. I feel rather badly about not having met them more than once. I never did ask your father's permission to marry you, did I?"

"He wouldn't care who I married—so long as I assured him I was in love" She laughed "I think I've always been a bit of a problem to my parents and they'll be delighted you're taking me off their hands."

"And I'll be delighted to have you on my hands!" said Robin.

She seemed to the young officer even more beautiful now than as he had remembered her during those months abroad Maybe he was just starved for the sight of a woman—most of the chaps could think and talk of little else. He had tried hard not to think too much about his fiancée The mental image of that slim, voluptuous young figure of hers had disturbed his nights quite often enough. He could hardly believe she was sitting here beside him now and that he could reach out and touch her. But he must remember to go carefully He'd found out already that she was a little afraid

of over-ardent love-making It would be different after they were married. A girl like Clare was obviously made for love. He'd have the joy of teaching her He was aware that she was completely virginal, untouched; and accepted this as ample explanation for her reticence when he became too passionate

He recalled some of the flattering remarks made by the chaps in his Company when they had seen a full-length snap of her that he had taken abroad with him. They'd all been envious and he'd come in for quite a bit of lewd banter about his wedding night before he'd finally come away on leave Well, soon Clare would be warm and eager and responsive in his embrace.

He held her at arm's length and looked at her adoringly. "My God, Clare, you are absolutely stunning. You can't begin to guess how much I've longed for this. When the C.O told me I could nip off a few days early, I could have kissed him."

"Well, kiss me instead!" Clare said, laughing. "It's the most wonderful surprise, Robin I've been dying to see you, too."

"It's grand to find you alone. I was sure Aunt Hilda and Pip would be knocking around somewhere." He kissed her again and sighed with contentment. "We've heard some pretty ghastly stories out there about the hit-and-run raids at home. I saw quite a bit of the damage from the train. It must be awful for you in London, darling. I've worried about you quite a bit, I can tell you"

Then he started to talk about the Tripoli Campaign. It was awful at times, he said. His best friend had been blown up by a tank only a few days ago

"Let's hope this bloody war will soon be over and we can settle down again to a decent sort of life"

She studied the fair boyish face and thought now that it showed marks of weariness. Her maternal instinct was aroused.

"You look as though you want sleep," she said.

"Oh, a couple of drinks and I'll be okay Now tell me about our wedding, darling?"

"All fixed. At St. Peter's in Brighton. And we're going to have the wedding breakfast at the Metropole."

That suited Robin. As long as he married Clare it mattered little to him where or how.

"I wish I could take you abroad for a proper honeymoon, but I'm afraid it'll mean a couple of days then back to Tripoli," he said.

"Never mind. At least when we have to separate we can feel we really belong to each other."

"We've never really belonged yet, have we?" he said, and kissed her rather more passionately than usual. She responded with more passion than she had ever shown before But after a moment or two, she drew away from him.

"I think we ought to go out and get something to eat, don't you?"

"Not for a moment, Clare, *please.* We may not get another chance to be absolutely alone and it's been so long since I had you to myself."

His voice had grown husky. She was not sufficiently experienced to realize that it was her body's warmth and proximity which affected the young man She sat down again and relaxed against him. He seemed very tense but she blamed the war.

She stroked his hair but after a few seconds he caught her hand and pressed the palm against his lips. Tenderness welled up in her and she said softly:

"Darling, I do love you. It's been awful without you. Except for my friend Liz Peverel I can't get really close to any of my girl friends. All they can talk about is sex and having what they call 'fun', Robin—you don't think I'm well, peculiar, because I don't want that sort of thing?"

He was too engrossed in coping with his ever-increasing desire for her to be alive to her trend of thought.

"Peculiar—you? No, of course not. I wouldn't want to change a hair of your beautiful head. I'm glad you don't find other fellows attractive. You belong to me and I love you so much it damn well hurts!"

She clung to him, feeling a sudden rush of gratitude. The other girls were wrong, she thought. Worth-while men like Robin didn't admire women who had had 'experiences'. *He respected her for being completely faithful.*

He was kissing her now as if he needed to prove to himself she really did belong to him.

"Darling Robin!"

She released herself gently, a little breathlessly. He let her go with reluctance Her flushed cheeks and unsteady breathing were enough for him for the moment

Even since Aunt Hilda had told him he could have a bed in the flat he'd thought of little else but the possibility that Clare might agree to sleep with him It was as if Fate had arranged things specially for them. It even crossed his mind that she had planned it this way, too, though naturally she would not admit openly to it. There were hidden depths in her—he was more than ever convinced of it—and although he knew without a doubt that she was a virgin, he was sure she wasn't exactly innocent. No girl was today, even if ignorant of the actual act of sex itself. It didn't occur to Robin that he might be asking his fiancée to behave in a way that was quite contrary to her principles. Casual sexual relationships with a lot of men who meant nothing much to a girl he deplored as heartily as Clare. This would be different . . . this was almost the same as if they were actually married. In peace time they could afford to wait until the wedding but in war, time was a luxury. He might be killed the very day he got back to Tripoli or Clare might be killed in an air-raid and they would have wasted seven whole days Clare was highly intelligent. She would see it this way, too. He stood up and touched her arm.

"Shall we go?" he asked

They dined and danced at the Savoy which was their favourite place. Robin ordered champagne. Clare never drank much, neither did Robin as a rule, but tonight he was drinking rather more than usual Clare noticed but did not mind. He'd just been through a harrowing time in Tripoli, and seen his best friend blown to pieces

They danced cheek to cheek, and asked the band to play their signature tune: "In the still of the night."

In between dances they talked about themselves. Clare said how much she had grown to dislike Swanningdean Farm, despite its beauty and comparative freedom from raids She much preferred living with her aunt and cousin and she enjoyed her work as a V A.D.

As the evening wore on, Robin drank more and his blue eyes became slightly glazed. Clare felt warm and happy. Much of her self-confidence had been restored and she didn't really mind much that he was a little drunk. But she didn't

want him to overdo it. Soon after midnight she suggested they should go home.

"It's been a wonderful evening and I'm absolutely thrilled you're back. Thanks for everything, darling," she said.

"Yes, it's been terrific," said Robin.

The weird banshee wail of the sirens rose and fell as they drove back to Sloane Square. Robin, fumbling in his pocket for change for the taxi-driver, looked up at the searchlights moving across the sky. It was a clear, luminous night.

They hurried into the entrance of the flats and walked upstairs with their arms round each other. The hum of aircraft reached their ears.

"So this is the sort of thing you've been putting up with every night," said Robin.

"Ssh, darling," she whispered, "don't let's wake Aunt Hilda up She'll be in bed and asleep by now"

As a kindly thought Aunt Hilda had left a bottle of whisky, two glasses and some soda water for them on the table in the sitting room.

The engaged couple sat down on the sofa, kissed each other, then held hands and smoked and listened for a moment to the distant sound of gun-fire. They could detect the steady drone of German bombers.

CHAPTER THREE

In the middle of a long kiss they heard the first bomb drop.

"Someone's got it," muttered Robin, drawing away from Clare.

"Yes," she whispered, "it's too awful to think about."

He stood up, looking rather white. He seemed a little unsteady on his feet. When he bent down to pour himself a whisky, Clare gently restrained him.

"It won't mix with all that champagne, darling."

He grinned foolishly at her.

"Nagging wife already?"

"Oh, Robin, I didn't mean to nag. Have a drink if you want one."

He looked at her, trying to focus. It was the sort of look that Clare had had from so many men but never before from Robin—the lustful look that scared her off.

"I think we ought to go to bed," she said hurriedly, "You must be tired and I know I am."

"I don't want to sleep—I want *you*," he mumbled.

"You've only got a week to wait," she whispered. She was rather sorry now he had drunk so much. She had never seen him in such a state before. But she was ready to forgive him. Why shouldn't a man get tight on the first night of his leave? She prided herself that she was broadminded.

But suddenly he sat down rather heavily on the sofa, clutched at her, pulled her on to his knees and began to breathe heavily.

"You're wearing the most exciting dress," he said, fingering her neckline. "Black suits you. It makes your skin look milk white. Your figure's perfect and your waist's smaller than ever."

She made no answer but took his hands and pushed them firmly away. His touch on her breast disturbed and annoyed her.

"Let's go to bed, darling."

He let her go and got up, pushing back his rumpled hair. He was still over-excited and full of desire. He had a charming smile and gave one now.

"Great minds think alike, my sweet. That's exactly what I want to do."

Relieved, she smoothed back her own tumbled hair. She was afraid she had been too unresponsive, and stood up and hugged him.

"My darling Robin."

"You're too attractive for words," he said burying his face against her hair.

"We'll make this leave the best you've ever had, Robin."

He laughed, his face still hidden.

"That goes without saying. What scent are you using now? It's very alluring."

"The remains of the bottle you brought me when you came home last time Je Reviens."

"Fits the occasion. *I've* come back—to you. *And* to this—"

He began to cover her face and neck with kisses.

She was full of love and kissed him back and then broke away again

"Let me go, darling."

"Not for long."

"Till tomorrow," she said breathlessly.

He looked at his watch.

"Tomorrow is now. It's half past one."

"Good night, darling," she said, "and thank you for a wonderful evening."

She went to her room and shut her door She hadn't felt tired when they first went out but now she felt absolutely exhausted She undressed and put on the pyjamas which she had worn since the raids started and which, if not glamorous, were warm and sensible should she have to get out of bed in a hurry.

She did nothing more than rub off her lip-stick with a face tissue, clean her teeth then tumble into bed. She was literally asleep in a few seconds. It was quite a shock when she was shaken gently into wakefulness again by two hands pressing her shoulders Her room was in darkness but her door had been left open a crack so that a shaft of light from the hall showed her that it was Robin who was sitting on her bed—he, too, in pyjamas.

Her eyes felt weighed down with the sleep into which she had so gratefully fallen Now she opened them wide and stared at Robin. She could see him smiling a little bashfully but eagerly. His hands moved inside the coat of her pyjamas and slipped over her bare shoulders.

"My precious Love I believe you were asleep."

"I was. What do you want, Robin?"

"Darling, what a hell of a silly question!"

At once she was alert, scenting danger, stiffening against it

"You shouldn't come in here like this, Robin darling—" she began to whisper.

"But Angel, you said 'Let's go to bed'."

"Well, I meant it, but I didn't mean *together . . .*" She gave a nervous laugh.

Even in the dimness she could see the disappointment in his eyes But he brought his cheek down against hers. His lips nuzzled her neck. He smelt fresh and masculine and

quite attractive. But her whole body shrank from this intimate contact. She felt his weight suddenly across her body.

"Robin, darling, you must say good night and go."

"But why? Your aunt's asleep, isn't she?"

"Robin, we're going to be married in a week's time."

His lips continued to explore her neck and then her ears

"You smell so gorgeous. You *are* so gorgeous. Don't push me away. I adore you."

"But we're going to be married next week—"

"And supposing we both die before—what with all these raids and things?"

"We won't. But anyhow I don't want it like this— I mean I don't want us to sleep together before we're married," she said breathlessly.

"Well, I do I've wanted you terribly the whole evening. I thought you wanted me, too"

"I do, but we've got to wait."

"We haven't got to at all This is a heaven-sent opportunity, Clare. Why shouldn't we? We're engaged—almost married."

She thought she would die of disappointment. She had counted on his integrity and understanding of her feelings

"No matter how much I want you I don't want you to make love to me until I'm your wife," she persisted.

"That's absurd. If we're going to be married next week, what difference will it make?"

"All the difference to me"

His fingers played with her hair. He gathered up a handful of it and kissed it. He was being quite humble now and adoring He pleaded:

"Be kind to me, darling. Please, please let me . . . Let us pretend this is our wedding night."

"I don't want to—I just can't," she said on the verge of tears.

"Clare, don't be such a saint."

The word 'saint' maddened her. She didn't feel like one at all. She loved Robin. She had looked forward to her wedding with longing and tenderness. Unconsciously, she had refused to think about the sexual side of marriage and had told herself not to worry about 'that side of things'—it would work out all right on their honeymoon She had presumed that because she was 'in love' with Robin the matter would take care of itself. Now, suddenly, Robin was

not only completely disregarding the conventions he approved of but was showing a side of his nature she had never seen before She was suddenly confused and frightened and certainly in no mood to take such a big step forward.

"Please go back to bed and be good, Robin."

"Be good," he whispered jeeringly. "You *are* trying to be a little saint."

"Then let me be what I want to be."

But now his hand was cupping the firm sweetness of one breast and he lost his head. He brought his lips down against her mouth so violently that she gave a muffled cry of pain. He was no longer her chivalrous and noble Robin but a stranger who disgusted her. She fought him silently, shocked that he of all people should be the one to offend her susceptibilities—the one to try to assault the ivory tower in which she had so long perserved her virginity.

He held her tightly, kissing and caressing her. She was terrified that Aunt Hilda would hear and come in and find Robin like this. In a frenzy, at last she pushed him away, wriggled out of bed and began to button up her pyjama top with trembling fingers.

She sobbed under her breath.

"You've spoiled everything. I hate you for it."

Robin stood up. He marched to the door, shut it a moment and stood with his back to it. He looked white and sullen. He said:

"I didn't know you felt this way about sex! I've always admired you for what I believed was your complete faithfulness to me. But now I'm beginning to wonder whether it's been any strain for you at all. I can't believe any woman who's been parted from the man she loves as long as you and I have been separated, wouldn't have shown a little more warmth. Maybe it's a question of warm hands, cold heart. Well, there's no use pretending sex isn't important to me because it jolly well is. If you aren't going to be able to enjoy going to bed with me, then say so now. I don't want a frigid wife who gives her body as a duty—that's hopeless."

Clare's hands clenched one another so tightly that her knuckles shone white

"This can't be happening!" she thought frantically "It's all wrong. This can't be my Robin . . ."

"Well? Let's have the truth, Clare. Does sex disgust you?"

What was the truth? She didn't know. She knew only that she couldn't stand the invasion of her privacy just now.

"I do love you, Robin. I swear I do. If only you would understand . . ."

"I think I'm just beginning to understand you very well," cut in Robin.

She looked so incredibly beautiful, so completely made for a man's delight that he was still not quite convinced that Clare was frigid. No woman with so much promise of passion could be Yet remembering now her virginal kisses, circumspect caresses, quick withdrawal if he grew too passionate, his instinct told him his guess was correct. And it wasn't just a question of waiting for the wedding night. This thing was fundamental

"No, you don't understand me You were just being—like an animal that couldn't wait," she was saying.

The words were out before she could stop them, wrung from some inner agonized portion of her very being where the truth must always have lain, unrecognized until now.

He drew a hand across his eyes. He was no longer drunk and was much more controlled than she was. He was really furiously angry with her.

She walked across to the dressing-table, found her engagement ring and held it out to him.

"You'd better take this I shall never marry you now. Never. It's quite obvious you aren't at all what I thought you were. I'd never be happy with you. I'm glad I realized in time what you were like."

He took the ring and turning, opened the door.

"I shan't stay here," he said quietly, "I'm going to pack and leave. I'll go and sleep somewhere else"

"That's right," said Clare hysterically. "Find another girl and sleep with *her*."

"Thanks for the suggestion," he said and walked out of the room

She heard the front door slam and then Aunt Hilda's door open.

Robin, great-coat unbuttoned, hat on the back of his head and face red, went out. He felt a little more intoxicated as the cold air hit him, and lurched along the road nursing his frustrated passions and his indignation against the girl who had denied herself to him.

He used to know a little night club in a basement off Knightbridge. He found it still existed and was open. He went down, glad to be in the warmth and lights away from the sound of anti-aircraft fire and of dropping bombs

One or two girls smiled at him as he passed their tables, which made him feel better He went straight to the bar. The first person he saw was an old friend from Nottingham, now in the Army and on leave, like himself. They slapped each other on the back, delightedly. Robin called for drinks and then blurted out his troubles.

The friend listened sympathetically.

"Won't you get married now, then?"

"Doesn't look like it, old chap"

"Well, didn't you know she was the frigid type?"

"No! I suppose I'd always behaved well myself until tonight, so I never realized she might have some sort of kink about sex"

"A girl's no use if she's like that," said his friend.

"But she oughtn't to *be* so frigid. God knows her mother wasn't."

"And just how would you know that?" the other man asked with a leer.

"I don't suppose *you've* ever heard of her," said Robin, "*but a lot of people have. There was a frightful scandal about* her up in the Midlands about twenty years ago My father remembers it. She ran away from a well-known Baronet with his gamekeeper. Her name was Lady Chatterley."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FIRST thing that Clare remembered the next morning was Aunt Hilda shaking her by the shoulder, telling her that she would be late for the hospital if she didn't wake up. Clare sat up at once. She had a violent headache, felt rather sick and in a flash of returning memory, all that had happened last night hit her like a blow.

"Oh God!" she muttered.

Aunt Hilda, ruddy-faced and buxom, in her green W V S. uniform, with a cigarette dangling from her lower lip, looked at her niece with her round and always rather surprised blue eyes

"What went on last night? Didn't your young man turn up? His bed isn't slept in."

"He didn't stay," said Clare. "Don't ask me anything now I must dash into my clothes or I'll be late."

"It's a better morning," said Aunt Hilda. "The fog's gone"

"Well, it's just about closing in on me," said Clare with a touch of irony.

The telephone bell rang. Aunt Hilda returned.

"That was Robin."

"I don't want to speak to him," said Clare sharply.

"Look here—what *has* happened?"

"The engagement is off. I'll explain later. But I don't want to speak to him."

"But he says he must see you when you come off duty."

"No," said Clare.

Aunt Hilda stared. She had never seen her niece like this before, red-rimmed eyes, tense white face. the slender fingers, twisting the long red-gold hair into a bun, were shaking so that one or two pins fell from them

"My word, you are in a state. Surely it can't hurt to talk to him"

"No, I won't"

"Well, what am I to tell the poor young man? He sounds grim"

"He can stay grim I've finished with him."

Clare was dressed in her coat and V A.D cap and out in the hall when Aunt Hilda finished talking to Robin.

"But your breakfast—" began Aunt Hilda.

"I don't want any. I can get a cuppa at the hospital"

"I think Robin will turn up despite my efforts He seemed insistent But you must manage your own life," said the ever-practical Aunt Hilda She had other things to think of There was a nasty war on The Russians were advancing in the Ukraine and Hitler was calling for total mobilization of man-power in all the occupied countries Aunt Hilda had a masculine outlook and no time to give a boy-and-girl dispute, even if this one concerned her cherished niece. And she

really did very often find Clare more sympathetic than her own daughter Pip who was so mad about boys and parties, though a nice child at heart. But too frivolous to suit Hilda—too like the father whom Hilda had banished from her bedroom very early on in their marriage which had ended in divorce

As Clare let herself out of the flat she called out to her aunt:

"Did Robin tell you where he was staying?"

"Yes. He's given me the telephone number for you to ring."

"Will you ring him please, Aunt Hilda, and tell him it's no good coming round here because I shall be gone."

Red-faced and breathless, Aunt Hilda ran after her niece.

"Hi! Gone where?"

"Home, to pack up the wedding presents. I shall get special leave and go down to Swanningdean first thing in the morning. And please tell Robin that *nothing* will make me change my mind, so he needn't waste time trying"

Clare, outside, now, still feeling sick and a little dizzy had a sudden horrifying picture of Robin last night—of his urgent inquisitive hands and his complete reversion from the understanding integral young man she had loved. She had fallen completely out of love with him. That was final. She wouldn't marry him if he was the last man in the world She never wanted to see him again, no matter how sorry he was for his behaviour. She was adamant with all the curious harshness and hostility that a woman can feel towards the man she no longer loves He'd fallen from his pedestal. She felt not the slightest sympathy nor gentleness in her remembrance of him. It was Robin who had finally taken her to the end of the tunnel and shown her the physical passion she'd been so afraid of, and she hated him bitterly for it.

At the hospital Clare only managed to work for a couple of hours before she was forced by violent headache and nausea to ask Sister Evans to let her off She also applied for an advancement of the week's leave that she was to have had for her marriage.

"Getting married before expected?" asked Sister Evans with one of her nastily envious glances at the young girl, only to receive an answer in the negative. Then Clare closed up like a clam, which further annoyed Evans but she told her

to go to the Clerical Department for her leave warrant and that if she must be sick all the time, she'd better buzz off home now

"I'm sorry," muttered Clare.

Sister Evans twisted her lips and hurried off to supervise a dressing She might have thought the redhead V.A D. was pregnant if she had been advancing the wedding. These girls today! She despised them all

Clare left the hospital unwillingly She had never gone off duty early before She felt really ill and knew she was not fit to do her job properly She had time only to wish Captain Talbot luck because he was getting up today for the first time, to try his crutches, then went off duty.

She took some tablets and slept for a couple of hours, then packed up and caught a train to Brighton She could get a bus out to Swanningdean She warned her mother of her coming but when Mrs. Mellors questioned her over the telephone as to why her plans had changed so suddenly, Clare offered no explanation

"I'll tell you when I see you, Mother. I'll be home for a week, anyhow."

"But the wedding—!" shouted Connie. It was a bad line Both Clare's mother and aunt were apt to raise their voices when they became excited

Clare's memory flashed back to the past. She was eight years old They were on a London bus going to choose her birthday present at Harrods. Her mother was arguing with the bus conductress about the fare As always when she became excited, her voice rose Conscious that people were staring at them, Clare, as a child, blushed and fidgeted in her seat, praying that people would not realise that it was her mother talking in that loud, imperious voice. She thought longingly of her father whose gentle soft voice would explain to her where the speckled thrushes built their nests, why the squirrels stored their nuts and how to find a badger's run Today was one of the days when she loved her father a hundred times more than she loved her mother She recalled their walks together through the woods at home, just the two of them and all the wild things, and over the top of the green Downs they would sniff the salt of the grey-and-white sea where he sometimes took her to paddle

As she sat in the train she remembered those moments of

closeness to her father but remembered, too, as many moments when she felt alien to him—the way he always put her mother first in everything. How deeply she had resented her second place in his affections One day, she had resolved, she would be grown-up and beautiful and mother would be old and ugly—then maybe he would put her first She had longed desperately for the day when she would be grown-up; tall, stately, beautiful, cool, calm and collected, the days of uncertainty, of blushing and confusion would be gone.

She sat back in the train, leaning her head against the prickly third-class carriage seat. She closed her tired eyes. Well—now she *was* grown-up and life wasn't any easier. Life seemed to have been a constant struggle ever since she could remember. Now it was the fourth year of the war, and there was this tremendous epic struggle to dwarf her own Was life like this for everybody or was it just that she, Clare Mellors, could not find a warm, safe niche and settle down in it? Why must she always feel so restless and dissatisfied? She'd been born into circumstances a great deal happier than thousands of other children She used to love her home. The old Sussex farmhouse with its flagged floors and the great Horsham slab roof covered with green lichen, was beautiful Mother had made the house warm, homely and comfortable, covering the stone flags with carpets and hanging warm thick curtains over the doors to keep out draughts She'd put in an anthracite boiler, too, for central heating She and Father—she had long ago dropped the childish 'Mummy and 'Daddy'—made her welcome when she went home for leaves and stand-offs Nothing ever seemed to change there—time stood still. Only her mother's plumpness and the grey in her father's hair marked the passage of the years

Why then couldn't she feel really 'at home' with them?

It was as if she always stood apart, seeing them as a stranger might, being critical and remote—never quite belonging to them.

Perhaps it will be different this time, Clare thought, hoping as she always did, but without confidence.

This afternoon before the February mists closed in, she got off the bus at Swan Cross corner and walked down the road away from the village and the little church. Here

under the shadow of the quiet sloping hills, it was peaceful—inviting, even on a cold February day Now and again a Fighter plane tore out of the clouds and swooped across the sky. Then the young pheasants and partridges flew up screaming harshly in fright, from the dark woods. Clare knew every landmark—the cottages, the apple orchards, the badly-kept untidy poultry farm belonging to Tom Longley, a friend of her father's; the great Tudor barn that some artist from London had been going to buy and convert but now had to leave empty because of the urgencies of war.

She knew every lane, copse, hedgerow. Above the village the Downs received the full force of the south-west gales which blew from the sea. The trees and shrubs were dwarfed and bent backwards. But down here it was sheltered. Things grew.

Just before Clare reached the first boundaries of Swanningdean Farm, she paused a moment to look at the silver birches. They looked lovely with the wine-red catkins dancing in the spring breeze She remembered coming down here to listen to the nightingales . . . thinking romantically of the week she had become engaged to Robin. Never, she thought wearily, had she felt less romantic than today, less anxious to face her parents' interrogation which she knew must await her.

Now she could see her home—the old, long, low-roofed farmhouse She liked the rose colour of the Tudor bricks and the tall chimney-stacks The pearl-grey smoke of the wood fire which she knew would be alight in the sitting-room, feathered up into the sky Away to the left, one could see over the hawthorn hedge, father's prize Angus herd, shaggy, dark-coated cattle, strong and solid as Britain itself in her resistance to her enemies Behind her on the other side of the road sheep were grazing, the fat ewes waiting to drop their lambs. The big walnut-tree by the front gate of the farm spread its magnificent bare branches towards the house In full leaf it was remarkably beautiful and quite a number of people touring Sussex came to see and photograph it

She could hear the quavering bleat of a goat The nanny-goat had been bought some years ago when her mother developed a craze to make strong cream-cheese She had just written to Clare to say that there was a kid on the way Always birth and giving birth down here The helpless female

submitting to the lustful male, Clare thought resentfully, so that there might be propagation.

Clare shivered and drew the collar of her coat up to her chin. She was in a bad way today. She would make some excuse to miss the family supper. She didn't think she could stand a long evening with them—their inquisitive eyes—their lack of understanding when she told them about Robin. She hadn't even made up her mind how to explain the broken engagement.

Then she was in the kitchen where she knew she would find her mother, who liked to do the cooking although there was help in the house. Connie Mellors was sitting in front of the old-fashioned range which she had doggedly refused to change for a modern stove, surrounded by cookery books and scraps of papers scribbled with recipes.

She was engaged in stuffing a chicken as her tall, beautiful daughter walked into the kitchen.

"Why, Clare, darling—*nice to see you!*" she exclaimed, and wiped her hands on her short floral cotton overall, and embraced Clare. Clare submitted with an effort. Connie stifled a sigh. Right from a tiny child, Clare had never been one to do a lot of kissing, nor liked to sit like some children, snug and happy on the parential lap. She had never been a very affectionate little girl, although she had a warm, sweet side, and was very generous. Clare would always give away what she had, if she thought somebody else wanted it more. And she was fond of looking after people. Connie hadn't been surprised when she went in for the V.A.D. training as soon as she was of an age to be enrolled.

"Sit down and take off your things and tell me what's happened I've been worrying about you," said Mrs. Mellors.

"Where's father?" asked Clare. She removed her coat and accepted a cigarette from the packet her mother drew from her overall pocket

Physically, these two were not at all alike Clare had taken her reddish-gold hair from her father and she had his narrow figure and fine skin Connie had always been a broad-hipped girl and had grown larger with the years. Her waist had spread She had a big bust and a double chin Yet she was still very handsome. She gave an impression of a physical warmth and a richness of the body, rather than of the mind, a good-tempered, pleasant friendly and sentimental

woman, who liked to keep souvenirs and reminisce, and to romanticize.

There were times when Clare came out of her own cool, guarded, innermost world and opened up to the stories her mother had to tell. She liked to hear about the days when Connie was still Miss Reid—Sir Malcolm Reid's daughter and how she and Aunt Hilda had finished their education in Germany. She liked to hear about Mother's war—that last terrible war which seemed insignificant compared to the present one, despite the fact that there had been so many more casualties.

Connie was a woman with a single purpose and a one-track mind—the track that Father walked along, Clare would tell herself, and almost envied her mother because she could live and enjoy such a shut-in existence. That was the worst of Mother—she was always pleased with herself and with Father. Clare had never been pleased with herself and wondered if she ever would be. Suddenly, for no particular reason, tears stung Clare's eyes and she spoke to her mother huskily:

"It's all a bit of a mess, I'm afraid. I'm feeling a bit upset."

It was so rare for her daughter to admit to any emotion that Connie immediately left her cooking, went to the girl and looked down at her with her soft, anxious eyes.

"Oh, Clare, what's happened? Are you really through with Robin? Aren't you really going to marry him, after all?"

"No!"

"I've spoken to Hilda but she seems to know very little except that Robin turned up unexpectedly last night and you two had a bust-up."

"Yes!"

"Aren't you going to tell me about it?"

For a moment Clare looked up at her mother. The kitchen was hot. There were little beads of sweat on the faint golden down upon Connie's upper lip. Clare hesitated. Would her mother understand?

"If I tell you, Mother, I don't want it all passed on to Father."

He's a man. I don't mind telling you because you're my mother, but—"

"Oh, you are queer!" broke in Connie "But you always were Never mind If it's your wish that it should be a secret, I'll keep it Out with it."

"It was like this—" said Clare, and in a few terse words, not very intimate or descriptive, she told her mother what had happened after she and Robin returned from the Savoy.

Mrs Mellors sat down opposite her daughter at the kitchen table, kept one anxious eye on the clock and the other on her oven, and listened with the bewilderment that usually clouded her mind whenever she had any kind of intimate talks with her daughter. Just imagine! To be so upset because the poor boy had wanted to sleep with her. As if it wasn't natural—more especially in war-time. What was the matter with Clare if she couldn't understand the boy wanting the fulfilment of love or, indeed, what was the matter if Clare didn't want it herself?

When she had first heard about the broken engagement she had felt quite proud of Clare. Connie had always thought (and so did Oliver) that Robin was a dull young fellow. Oh, so charming, and English, and well-bred, but too conventional for words Connie had never been one for conventions and certainly Oliver Mellors wasn't. Connie had always hoped her daughter would marry someone with Oliver's vision—his deep, rich understanding of a woman and of feminine needs. She would be quite glad to cancel the arrangements for the wedding and help Clare return the presents which were now littering tables and shelves in the spare room But she would have preferred to hear that Clare had broken with Robin because she had become bored by him He wasn't what Connie called a real *man*. Oliver had always said Robin would be the type to ask a girl's permission before he did what the good Lord intended a man to do to a woman.

If Clare hadn't looked so sad and tired, her mother would have laughed aloud. But she was an immensely kind woman and she spoke very kindly to her daughter.

This was the old, difficult, incomprehensible Clare, with whom she had felt estranged since she was fourteen years old It was not that Connie didn't admire virginity nor believe that it should be respected deeply. But she had decided long ago that the most important thing in life was

to be true to oneself. And if you wanted a man who wanted you, you were a hypocrite if you fobbed him off because of man-made laws Only a lot of old, fuddle-headed Quakerish gentlemen of past history (themselves indulging in every possible lust of the flesh) forbade women to be likewise. She realized that she and Oliver had a set of morals which were different from the conventional ones They believed it was far more honest for a girl to go to bed with a boy she loved and who loved her, than to stick to her virginity and then to sell it to some young man with money or a title. To give way to real love—a real wanting of each other—had never seemed to them a crime.

Of course, the outside world had been shocked. But they were used to shocking people They had done so since the time they had given way to their own glorious need for each other up in the little gamekeeper's hut which had become like a shrine in their memory If principles and virtues were under the magnifying glass, what about the loyalty she and Oliver had shown each other over the past twenty-one years? Didn't that count? Even if it hadn't in the first place been blessed by a church and a marriage licence, weren't they as good as some of these married couples who slipped into beds that didn't belong to them and were far from faithful?

She knew she couldn't make Clare see this point of view, and somehow it was difficult trying to explain it to one's own child Oliver didn't seem to find it embarrassing but Connie sometims did; a reversion, perhaps, she would say, to her own upbringing and her life with her first husband

"Well, *really* . . . even if you didn't want to sleep with Robin, you might have forgiven the fact that he wanted it. He paid you a compliment."

Clare went scarlet

"Mother, you are impossible. How can it be a compliment? I consider it an insult"

"But it's natural—" began Connie.

"You and I have never agreed about nature," broke in Clare.

Her mind whirled back again into the past She was twelve and she had just come home for the holidays after her first term at Horringford House in Eastbourne. It was time for supper. She was standing outside her mother's and

father's bedroom wanting to go in to fetch a slide for her hair. But her knock was unanswered

Unthinkingly she had walked into the bedroom and found her mother in bed. Her father was beside the bed without any clothes on and she had felt her face betray her appalled embarrassment with its usual tell-tale blush Her mother [illegible] looked surprised.

"Good heavens, Clare, there's no need to look so upset. It isn't the first time you've seen us in the nude."

Clare had tried to explain that the new matron, whom she adored, had been talking to them about the necessity for modesty. But mother had burst out laughing and called Miss Watkins "a nasty-minded old spinster."

"Don't forget that God put Adam and Eve into the world naked It was only when the serpent slipped in that they became ashamed and were banished from the Garden of Eden There's nothing to be ashamed of in one's body . . ."

But Clare, adolescent, had felt deep within herself the need for modesty and she had run to her own room and locked the door and wondered how it was possible for her own mother not to understand.

No, she and her mother and father didn't see life through the same view-finder. It was better perhaps to accept this and not confide in her mother any more than was necessary To do so would only end with Mother making *her* feel in the wrong—as if somehow it was all her's—Clare's—fault.

"Well, I think you ought to try and forgive the poor boy and send him off to the war happy again, even if you don't want to marry him," Connie was saying. "Sometimes I think you're very hard"

Clare sprang to her feet.

"I'm not. But I have my own ideals."

Connie looked curiously at her daughter's strained young face. Poor child, she seemed to suffer badly from an excess of idealistic fervour

"I'd just like to get this clear, my dear. Are you only cross with Robin because he wanted to go to bed with you, and do you feel that if you *had* got married everything would have been quite all right, both in the bed and out of it?"

Clare's gaze wavered

"I don't say that"

"Then it was because he isn't the right man," said Connie

triumphantly. "If he had been, you would have wanted it, too."

Clare opened her mouth to speak and turned away again. She had been about to say "yes" but it wasn't strictly true. She had realized last night in that dark bedroom with Robin trying to rouse her passions, that she would never have wanted him that way. Once again she felt like crying, as though something deep down in her nature, as inexplicable and mysterious as a myth, warned her that she would never find the fulfilment and joy that her mother spoke of.

"Well, now you know and you can just tell Father I don't like Robin any more."

"Oh, well," sighed Connie, "tomorrow we'll pack up the presents. Don't make youself ill over it, Clare. There are other men."

"I don't want other men. I don't want any man."

"I don't believe that. You can't be my daughter—your father's flesh and blood—and so absolutely lacking in warmth."

Clare felt too tired and dispirited to argue. She lit her second cigarette and smoked it gloomily while her mother got on with stuffing the chicken. There were scones baking in the oven. The smell did not tempt her. She wanted to go to bed, and get away from all this discussion which got her nowhere. Mrs Mellors decided that the best way to deal with Clare was to take her mind off her broken engagement. She would try to cheer the girl up.

"There are some young American pilots stationed near here in a new airfield they've taken over. We've had one or two of them in for a cup of tea or a glass of ale lately. I'm going to ask them to supper before you go back again. I think you'll like them. They're great fun."

Clare hadn't the slightest wish to meet the American officers. But she knew her mother meant well. She nodded and said laconically, "Okay."

"Your father's pleased. Lady Lou has had a beautiful foal, sired by that chestnut belonging to Colonel Ventnor—the one that used to win at all the Brighton races. You must go and see the foal in the morning."

Clare nodded again and shut her eyes. More births. More mating. That was one of the reasons she didn't like being at home.

Connie said:

to help me I've no one else And it'll be his grandchild when it's born"

Clare walked to the window again and stared out. The peace and beauty of this golden March morning had been destroyed for Clare in a terrible fashion

It was going to be a shock to her parents, too, when they came back from their nice drive by the sea!

Clare could not quite accustom herself to the thought that this wretched creature on the sofa was closely related to her. She heard Gloria's voice·

"I'm sure I beg your pardon if I offend you but I feel sick."

Clare pulled herself together Once again it was the nurse and the humanitarian in her which superseded the egotist and the hypersensitive critic of her parents' frailties What happened during the next half hour was scarcely pleasant The unfortunate Gloria was very ill indeed But it was Clare who supported her, washed her, put her on the spare room bed under a blanket and let her sleep for an hour. Then at one o'clock she went up and roused her Within the hour her mother and father would be here Something in Clare rejected the idea that her father should see this daughter of his as Clare had first seen her In any case, having removed the damp horrid dress and awful coat, Clare had chucked them in a corner thinking them fit only to be burned

Gloria looked very pale and ill now When she started to mutter words of apology and gratitude, Clare sharply silenced her.

"Please don't bother to say anything Do you feel able to get up now?"

"Yes, I'm all right. It was just all that food when I was so starved."

The poor creature, thought Clare How awful to think of her father's child being dragged up and turned into this sort of person—without education; without love or affection, or home Clare found an old pleated skirt on an elastic band and a long loose woolly cardigan Somehow she managed to get the girl into these and then into an old tweed coat of her mother's which was amply big enough She made Gloria brush her hair and powder her face, and take off the cheap dangling earrings She looked fresher now and much younger, although she must, Clare reflected, be at least thirty Now Clare realized why she had found those blue eyes so

familiar. *They were the same as Father's.* Father had those same wonderful eyes in a narrow pale face.

When Gloria saw herself in the mirror she gave a little laugh and said:

"My! I do look respectable"

"Yes, you do," said Clare coldly. "You'd better come down now and wait for—for Father to come back."

"I'm sure you've been very kind—" began Gloria.

"I tell you I don't want to be thanked," interrupted Clare.

"Still you have been kind," said Gloria stubbornly.

I've done what I can for her, thought Clare, but I don't want to see her again. I don't want to stay here and have to listen to her any more. This is the sort of thing my mother had to risk when she married my father. And its come back on me After this they won't be quite so filled with self-satisfaction.

She threw the much-refreshed Gloria a Sunday newspaper and left her in the sitting-room to glance at it.

"You'll feel better when you've had some food," she said "I'll ask Mrs Jenkins to boil you an egg. You'd better not have the goose."

Then she walked out of the room She just could not face a family scene when her parents returned, nor be present when her father found the daughter of his first marriage waiting to see him Least of all could she bear to witness the shame and disillusion her mother must surely feel when she was finally brought face to face with stark reality in place of the nice romantic world of the happy egotist in which she and Father had been so smugly living.

CHAPTER NINE

CONNIE CAME into the sitting-room with her husband, her arm linked in his, her cheeks flushed from the walk along the sea-front and her hair untidy from the strong sea breezes.

Her eyes sparkled with health and happiness. At the sight of the strange girl on the sofa she stopped and stared. But Gloria now took charge of the situation with a complete lack of self-consciousness.

"Why, I recognize *you!*" she said to Connie. "You're Lady Chat'ley. You haven't changed, Dad Don't you recognize me? It's your daughter, Connie—I'm now called Gloria."

Oliver Mellors turned pale. This, he realized, at once, must be his daughter by his first marriage Last time he'd seen her she was nine years old. This was Bertha's child—and at second glance, she seemed not unlike his first wife. That was soon evident. He gave Connie a quick anxious look. This must have come as a great shock to her as well as to him

Connie's eyes stared back into his with something like an appeal in them. She didn't want to believe that this was the truth Connie—or Gloria—looked incredibly unpleasant The hair was frizzy—badly permed—the hands were red and the nails dirty Her condition Connie noticed with growing concern, the girl was pregnant and *she was Oliver's daughter.*

Gloria seemed oblivious of the embarrassment she was causing She broke the silence:

"Don't you remember me, Lady Chat'ley—you tried to comfort me when Dad shot my cat what was poaching? And you gave me sixpence once, too"

"I am not Lady Chatterley now—I am Mrs Mellors!" Connie said sharply. Yes—she recalled the child only too well—in the old days she had found her pitiable.

"I'm sorry to turn up like this," Gloria went on, addressing her father. "But you were the only one I could think of what might help me You see, I'm going to have a baby and I've no one else to turn to I haven't any money and I don't know what to do. I thought maybe you'd help." Her pale eager face became strained and uncertain

Oliver Mellors lit his pipe with hands that for once were unsteady. He *felt* no kinship with this untidy wretched young woman and yet his mind could not refuse to recognize their relationship. However much he might dislike the idea, this was his flesh and blood, of *his* conceiving Her presence seemed to bring Bertha's ghost into this pretty, sunny room and with it the memory of her nagging tongue and malicious spiteful ways.

The years rolled back . . . it must be twenty years ago since he had lived with the child and her "Gran," at Wragby He had had no feelings for her even then but he'd done his best for her. When Gran had died, Bertha had written to say she was taking little Connie back and would he please send some money. He'd sent her fifty pounds and expected to be asked for more but Bertha never contacted him again so he had presumed the child was all right.

"Better tell me what's happened!" he said.

Gloria launched into the same story that she had already told Clare. As Oliver listened, frowning, his conscience began to stir. Of course he had to admit the kid had never had much of a chance—not with Bertha for a mother. If he'd kept in touch with the child over the years he might have been able to guide her somehow It wasn't all Bertha's fault the child had turned out like this He was to blame, too. Compassion moved in him where love was impossible. She was carrying a child and like all living creatures, needed gentleness and protection. Even if she hadn't been his daughter, he couldn't have refused help to a woman in her condition.

"How did you find me, Connie?"

"Don't call me *Connie*, Dad. Mum changed my name to Gloria It's nicer, don't you think?"

Gloria! Connie shivered. This was Oliver's daughter—Clare's half-sister! It didn't seem possible. For once, she could find no words and her eyes turned to her husband in bewilderment What did *he* feel? What was he going to do? And most of all, where was Clare? Did she know? What must she be thinking?

For the first time in years, Connie was conscious of her old snobbish instincts, her former environment, her education and her position. Because of the great love that she bore Oliver and because of his devotion to her, she had been able to reject that old life and find complete contentment and fulfilment in the new But this girl with her dissipated face and dirty nails, repelled Connie. Her whole being rejected such an intrusion into her home, her life She felt afraid—as though the world she and Oliver had built together was being threatened She even felt unclean because of the contact with "Gloria", and for the first time in her life she

saw her life with Oliver through *Clare's* eyes. How appalled Clare must be!

She realized suddenly that Oliver's daughter was wearing some of Clare's old clothes—Clare must have given them to her If so, what must Gloria have looked like when she first arrived at the house? Poor Clare . Gloria said that she had talked to her on her arrival Clare had gone off—no doubt unwilling to stay with such an unwelcome and unsavoury guest

Agitated, Connie rose and went to the door.

"Clare? Clare, come here a minute, duckie"

Clare appeared from the kitchen Mrs Jenkins was cooking the lunch and the purely domestic routine of life in the warm kitchen had soothed her raw spirit a little.

Her mother met her in the hall As Clare saw her mother's face, flushed with distress, her heart softened. This had clearly shaken her a great deal She put an arm round the plump shoulders—the first voluntary demonstration of affection she had made towards Connie for a very long time

"Poor you! It's a bit much, isn't it? That awful girl! If only she were a bit more . . . well, you should have *seen* her when she arrived!"

"I can guess It was nice of you to give her those clothes, Clare . . I wouldn't have wanted your father to see her looking any *worse* It's been an awful shock to him, too."

"What's he going to do about her?"

"I don't know. We'll have to wait and see what he thinks best"

"Will she have to stay here?"

Connie looked uneasy

"I don't see where else she could go, Clare She has no other relatives, but your Father and someone must look after her."

Clare's mouth felt dry She swallowed, her feelings lying like a cold weight on her heart. It was true that the girl needed someone to look after her, see her through her confinement, show her a little genuine affection and give her security—it must be terrible to be in her condition and quite alone in the world. If only she wasn't Father's flesh and blood . *his* responsibility

"There *are* homes for unmarried mothers—I suppose she wouldn't want to go to one of those?"

She felt a little ashamed even suggesting such a thing and was not surprised when her mother said:

"She is so terrified of being ALONE, Clare She begged us to let her stay here. Would you mind so much?"

"Frankly, yes!" said Clare. "But I can see Father doesn't want to turn her out. There seems no alternative."

Connie sighed.

"I realize what this must mean to you, Clare, but knowing you, I'm sure you wouldn't want us to turn her away—no matter how awful you may think her She's pathetic really—the all too obvious product of a broken marriage and no education or decent home."

Clare also sighed. Somehow she did not want to be made too aware of her intrinsic compassion for Gloria She would have found it easier to ride on the tide of anger and revulsion which had been her first reaction to such a half-sister. If she had felt no sympathy she might have given her parents an ultimatum—either she goes or I do—that might have created an interesting problem for her parents Perhaps they would would have chosen Gloria whose need for them is so obviously greater than mine, Clare thought ironically.

Not for the first time, she considered how much easier life might be if she were harder One occasionally met women who were quite ruthless in their pursuit of their own happiness; who fought for what they wanted with a complete disregard for other people's feelings; who ignored those for whom they had no further use—and without the least compunction Had her nature been like this Clare could have avoided this particular situation in the first place She could have told Gloria that her father did not live here or "paid" her to go away, assured her that her father would have nothing to do with her. Instead, she had even made Gloria look presentable so that her father should not feel repelled.

"Clare, if Father should ask us to take Gloria in, you won't raise any objections?"

Clare shook her head with sudden weariness.

"I've no right to object, Mother. She's his daughter as much as I am. I'm not so hypocritical as to pretend I could ever like Gloria She represents all that I find repulsive At the same time I can't help being sorry for her. I can see that Father has a sort of duty towards her Naturally I don't *want* her here—I never could, so please don't start trying

to make me see her good points or be 'a sister to her' or anything like that So long as you appreciate that the less I see of her the happier I'll be, I'm prepared to accept her As for the baby—well, I've a certain sympathy for *it*—after all, I was illegitimate, too, wasn't I?"

Connie looked so hurt that Clare regretted those words but as so often happened when she, herself, was hurt by life, she found herself taking it out on her mother. She didn't want to upset her—but the words tumbled out—impulsively, before she could stop them

They were both relieved when Oliver came into the hall

"Young Connie, or Gloria as she calls herself seems dead against going to a Home," he said "I can understand in a way—for her it would be a bit like I'd have felt if I'd been sent to a workhouse You wouldn't know anything about that, Clare—the disgrace working-class folk felt in my day if they were forced into an institution."

Connie understood what he was feeling—the same pity for the girl lay deep in her own body She'd been lucky—she'd had enough money to support herself in Scotland while Clare was on the way Money and position, her father's help, had made things easy for her This girl had nothing and no one in the whole world but Oliver to whom she could turn for help

Connie laid a hand on her husband's arm and said quietly. "If it had been Clare, I'd have wanted you to take her in and help her Well, Gloria is your child—if you want her to stay here for a while, I understand"

"Connie, ma lass!" He looked down at his wife with such open and urgent love that Clare turned away, embarrassed.

"I'm going up to my room, Mother, to pack. I really ought to catch the first bus after lunch I meant to tell you this morning—you see, I've some washing and ironing to do at the flat before I go on night-duty."

Connie began to protest Oliver laid a restraining hand on her arm, and Clare walked quickly away from them

"She'll be better away for a bit," Oliver said quietly "Hilda will look after her and she's best out of the mess for the time being. Now about Gloria—Tiddler's Cottage is empty—what do you think, Con—Gloria could move in there?"

Tiddler's Cottage was a little stone-built house, semi-

detached, in a row belonging to the farm about a quarter of a mile from the house. It had no bathroom but water and light were laid on. It had been used by one of the cowmen and his wife who were now in a council house Only the other day, Oliver had amused himself doing a few repairs, mending the roof and plastering up a damp wall. It was a pretty little place overlooking Tiddler's Lake where the children fished and occasionally a pair of swans made their home.

"We could put in a few bits of furniture—we stored quite a lot of stuff in the attic. Gloria says she'd like having her own home until her time comes. Mrs. Potter next door could keep an eye on her. She's a good soul," said Mellors thoughtfully.

Yes, thought Connie, Mrs. Potter had done a bit of midwifery in her time—she'd be useful in the circumstances though it might be awkward if she talked. There would be gossip—a daughter of Oliver's, pregnant, suddenly arriving down at Swanningdean with no sign of a husband, would hardly pass unnoticed.

However much Connie's former status and sense of propriety stirred within her, and however much she disliked the idea of having Bertha's daughter so near, she showed her mettle now She said, quietly:

"That'll be all right by me, Oliver. I think I can find plenty of oddments—curtains and a carpet and so forth for the cottage."

He gave her a kiss The look of gratitude in his eyes was all she needed to reassure her as they went back to the sitting-room.

Connie cleared her throat and walked across to Gloria. She became her practical, cheerful self.

"Now then, stop weeping, my dear, and let's make plans. You'll have to stay here for a night or two. There's plenty of room. And then we'll get busy tomorrow with the cottage."

Gloria dabbed at her streaming eyes.

"I'm sure I can't thank you enough, Lady Chat—" she began, but corrected herself, blushing, "I mean, Mrs Mellors."

Connie bit her lip. Gloria's mistake had almost made her blush.

What a long way she had come since she had been Lady

Chatterley—living with Clifford—putting up with the aggravation of Mrs Bolton who looked after him while she lived. It seemed another life when she was running the household and walking in her expensive tweeds around Wragby visiting the cottagers What a long stretch to that little hut—and to Oliver; to those fantastic secret hours spent with him, to the ecstasy of the splendidly unashamed love-making between them.

Oliver was silent and brooding But Connie kept the conversation going as she made cheerful plans for Gloria She must call herself Mrs Coutts—that had been her mother's name. They could tell everybody her husband was serving out in the Middle East

"I dislike pretence and hypocrisy but country people are not very broadminded and they'd make life miserable for you if we told them the truth."

"I'm sure I don't want to cause any trouble," said Gloria who had cheered up considerably now that she knew she was not going to be turned away. "In partickler, I don't want to upset your daughter. She was ever so kind to me before you came."

"My daughter doesn't live here—she'll be going back to Town this afternoon," Connie said uneasily She was thankful Gloria did not question her further about Clare's departure. It would have been difficult to explain

After lunch, Oliver suggested taking Gloria across the fields to have a look at Tiddler's Cottage and give Jem a walk. The afternoon was still fine and warm Connie went up to Clare's room where she was busy packing.

"I know this has upset you, Clare, but she's really not so bad as one first imagines Try to be a little tolerant . . ." Connie began as she stood watching Clare put her night things into a zip-bag.

"Tolerant of what?" Clare broke in stonily "I told you I'd never be able to *like* her. Gloria is little better than a prostitute—she admitted those Americans had been keeping her I think it's disgusting."

"But, Clare, maybe she was driven to it Don't you see, she never had anyone to love her or care whether she lived or died She had no parents around to guide her—only that awful woman, her mother, as an example when she was small."

"Will you please stop it, Mother. I've accepted that she needs help and that she should stay here but that doesn't alter the fact that I can't stand the sight of her or bear the thought that she's related to me."

"Clare, Clare, if you'd ever learned to accept the realities of life and not been so tied up inside yourself, you'd understand better how these things happen—you wouldn't be so hard"

"Why is it that if somebody wants to live decently and stick to their ideals, they are called 'hard'? I believe you and Father have more understanding for Gloria than you've ever had for me"

"That's absurd, my dear."

"Well you see her point of view—never mine."

Connie sighed

"Perhaps that is because Gloria is at least *human.* Sometimes I wonder if you are, Clare. Haven't you any faults, weaknesses, vices?"

"Look here!" Clare burst out in a low angry voice. "Let's stop the analysis I don't want to have another row with you, Mother We've had far too many already All this is going over old ground I suggest we are better when we agree to *dis*agree—about Gloria—life—everything else You and Father and I don't see eye to eye about anything"

She was standing at her bedroom window, tears of sheer frustration in her eyes She saw the figure of her father hurrying up the garden path. He looked up, saw her and called out.

"Clare, where's your mother?"

"Up here!"

"Ask her to come down Gloria's been took ill. We got no further than the old oak when she went down like a ninepin. I reckon the lass has been starving lately. She's passed out"

Clare at once forgot her personal misery. Her nurse's training always had been of real importance to her Followed by her mother she ran down the stairs They hurried to the tree Gloria lay on the ground, her white face turned up to the sky She looked awful, Clare thought, and went down on her knees, took one flaccid wrist and felt the pulse. Then she looked up over the shoulder at her parents

"I think maybe you should call Dr. Cole."

"Is she bad?" asked Mellors anxiously

"She may even be having the baby," said Clare. "I don't think so, but I think you ought to ask a doctor. If you can get hold of Withers and carry her indoors, I'll put her to bed."

Connie rushed to the telephone to summon Dr Cole, who lived a couple of miles away. Mellors went quickly to fetch his head cowman who, fortunately, since it was Sunday afternoon would be at home.

A few minutes later Gloria was in the spare room in which she had been lying before Connie and Oliver returned from Brighton. Clare bathed her face, put her into one of her mother's voluminous night gowns and attended her in a calm, professional manner until Gloria returned to her senses again

The tears rolled weakly down the older girl's cheeks.

"I'm sorry," she whispered hoarsely, "is it the baby? Am I going to have it?"

"Have you any pain?"

"No, I just feel awful. I come over queer when I was walking along with Dad"

Clare winced at the name. Yet she had felt pity as she undressed the sick girl She was pathetically thin, her arms and legs like match sticks and her ankles swollen. She had the very white skin which ran in the Mellors' family. Devoid now of make-up, one could see that she might once have been good-looking, before the life she had led had set its mark on her face.

"You've been so good to me . . " Gloria said, sniffing and looking at her half-sister with swimming eyes. "I'll ever forget what you've done."

"It was only what any nurse would do!" Clare replied coldly, loath to admit anything personal in her attentions.

She stayed with Gloria until Dr Cole came, roused from a peaceful Sunday afternoon nap, by Mellors Once Clare was sure that he had no need of her services, that Gloria was not commencing labour but had just fainted from sheer weakness and anaemia, Clare decided to leave

When she said good-bye to her father, he gave her a quick covert look and said:

"I know [illegible] a shock for you, Clare, I'm sorry"

[illegible]

stand that I can't accept her as a sister—become devoted to her and all that. I'll try to be nice to her but I can't *like* her."

"That's all right, lass, I understand," said Mellors quietly.

But Connie, deeply distressed, insisted on walking to the bus stop with Clare.

"You've been very kind to Gloria, I know you've got a kind heart and you're a wonderful nurse Dr. Cole said you'd been most efficient. Why can't you be more tolerant, too?"

"Always this accent on tolerance!" Clare exclaimed "Do you really expect me to welcome Gloria with open arms? She represents everything I most dislike"

"It's hopeless. You'll never understand. There's something wrong with you. Sometimes I think you actually dislike your father and me. We've always loved you so much and you've always resented it When you were quite a small girl, you put up a barrier between us"

"You built that barrier yourself!"

"But how, *how?* We let you lead your own life since you left school. Both your father and I wanted you to develop in your own way without prejudice or undue restraint We both loved you so much, Clare You were the child of our love What have we done to make you feel so antagonistic towards us?"

Clare strode along as though walking quickly could relieve her feelings. She half shut her eyes against the bright warmth of the sun, blind to its dancing lights on the fresh spring foliage Her mother followed, finding the girl difficult to keep up with.

"Gloria's arrival is just another reminder of what happened before I was born," Clare was saying. "Perhaps you never realized, Mother, that your little love-child might not like to be constantly reminded of the uncontrolled passion that conceived her!"

"Clare! Oh, Clare, that sort of talk gets us nowhere Why can't you believe that it wasn't just passion between Father and me, it was *love*"

"I'm not denying you love each other—it's right that you should What I've always resented is the way you both showed your passion for one another in front of me, a mere child. Do you think I apprecated you walking round the

house without clothes on, preaching the 'Beauties of Nature', giving each other *'let's-go-to-bed'* looks in *front of me*"

"You make it all sound horrible," Connie, flushed and puffing, was almost in tears. "We thought it just the reverse. We didn't realize . . ."

"No, I'm sure you didn't," broke in Clare bitterly "You never saw yourselves through *my* eyes You never once imagined that I might find your view objectionable Remember the day you decided to introduce me to the 'miracle of Birth' I think that's what you called it I'll never forget that poor little calf being born—I was five years old Remember, Mother? The cow suffering so horribly and Father showing me how the calf was strangled by its umbilical cord. A charming lesson for a sensitive little girl"

"We didn't know it would be born dead. And how could we realize you would take it that way?"

"No, you were too sure YOU were right You never have asked yourself what I thought or felt For instance—if you'd had the smallest understanding, the least you and Father could have done was to reserve exhibiting your great passion for each other until you were in your own bedroom"

"We thought it good for a child to grow up in the knowledge that its parents had a great love for one another"

"Love? Lust, you mean I suppose you couldn't help it. I've read in books some women are made that way but I think you might have tried a little harder to control yourself in front of me As for Father, well, the only excuse for him is that he's never known how *decent* people behave"

"Clare! Your father is a hundred times more of a man than Clifford Chatterley ever was A finer, better person in every way, and don't for God's sake add snobbery to all your complexes"

"If I am a snob, you made me that way. You sent me to the 'best' schools which meant I made friends amongst the 'best' people How do you think I felt comparing Father with the father of that girl Cynthia who used to be my best friend at school? Perhaps you don't remember Sir James Goalen? I think you described him on Speech Day as 'such a distinguished-looking man' He was much more than that He was erudite and appreciative of art and music; he could talk about opera, science, history—so many things How could I ask Cynthia back to our house with you and Father

mooning over each other and no other topic of conversation but the birds and the bees If you wanted me to respect Father, you shouldn't have educated me the way you did Sometimes I've felt that if you'd brought me up as a simple farmer's daughter, I'd have been happier I might have rolled in a haystack with Father's hired help and got myself pregnant like Gloria Then maybe we'd all have understood each other a bit better and been one big happy family the way you and Father planned"

They had reached the bus stop Clare turned and looked at her mother for the first time and saw tears running down the pink downy cheeks. She felt suddenly deflated—as though her impassioned outburst had exhausted all the emotions that had writhed and seethed for so long within her She felt a deep remorse because she had made her mother cry She ought never to have said those dreadful things, but she'd been quite out of control. Now she regretted it deeply even while she would not deny what she had said A vague tenderness for her mother that was deep down within her, made her drop her bag and put her arms around Connie

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she said helplessly.

Connie choked and clung to the girl

"I'm sorry, too It seems your Father and I have failed you There's nothing we can do about it now We're all as we are We can't change."

Clare kissed her than picked up her bag, thankful to see the bus in sight

"Good-bye, Mother. Thank you for everything Try to forget what I said!"

Connie returned to the farm. Mellors was standing by the gate waiting for her, his pipe in his mouth When he saw his wife's tear-stained face, he sighed.

"Poor Con—another dust-up wi' our lass?"

Connie nodded

"She said some dreadful things. Oh, Oliver, she seems to be so against us because we tried to teach her that sex is a big part of loving"

He put an arm around her and they walked slowly indoors

"Mebbe we went the wrong way about it Mebbe not 'Tis hard to say But she's still an ignorant lass for a' she

[illegible] a [illegible] She's like you were, Connie."

"Like [illegible]"

"Yes! When I first saw you, my lady, you were as [illegible] [illegible] Your'd been brought up to [illegible] another you never knew [illegible] You was' scared of [illegible] we met, Connie [illegible] Maybe [illegible] find someone to calm her. She's like a wild thing. Maybe we did frighten her [illegible] in good [illegible] Stop [illegible], lass, and come [illegible] [illegible] has gone and Gloria is asleep, I'll make you a cup of tea."

She went with him, heartsick but comforted. [illegible] though she was by this terrible [illegible] of father [illegible] was all for Clare whose turbulent spirit and [illegible] must be tormenting her as she [illegible] back to Town.

Dear Oliver, thought Connie, [illegible] This man who had been able to [illegible] rapture of loving could soothe her [illegible] was, to her, a marvellous man. [illegible] moment if she was sorry that she had left Clifford [illegible] for his gamekeeper she would have [illegible] I shall always be glad, glad, glad [illegible]

But Clare had no one to comfort her.

Thinking of Clare, the mother [illegible] that there had been times in the past when she had actually asked herself if she had made the right choice. For though Connie was a [illegible] she, too, had had her moments of great and generous [illegible], she, too, had had her [illegible] weakness, of remembering that she was Sir Malcolm Reid's daughter and the [illegible] of a Baronet.

It hadn't been easy [illegible] she waited for Clifford to give her a divorce and for Oliver to get free from his wife. True, she had never really wanted for money for she had her own, and had been able to buy the farm for Oliver. But she'd had to work it with him, [illegible] exhausting, monotonous, dirty work at the start. It had been some time before Oliver had pulled the farm together and they had been able to make ends meet, pay their debts and get more help.

She had [illegible] too lazy at first and too [illegible] to admit [illegible] the old world [illegible] she had [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Connie had abandoned! [illegible]

Hilda had stood by her, then Clare, the baby, came and charmed them both and brought joy into their lives.

For Connie, the married woman, life soon became a glorious existence and it was of no importance that Oliver's upbringing and the scandal attached to them, ostracized them socially with the County people. As long as Clare was small the ostracism hadn't touched *her*. It was only later after Clare went to boarding school that the child changed noticeably Then some of Connie's happiness had been tinged with doubts.

It was Connie who had insisted that Clare went to a good boarding school. Oliver would have been willing to let her grow up like the children of their farm-hands who attended the State school. He had been over-persuaded by Connie's argument that she owed their daughter the same educational advantages that she herself had been given.

Had she been wrong—wrong all the time? With a deep unease, she recalled the state of mind in which Clare had left her just now. Oliver had told her not to fret but how could she help it? The increasing hostility of her only child was very hard to bear.

CHAPTER TEN

IT WAS NOT easy for Clare to get the thought of Gloria out of her mind. She did not speak of it to Aunt Hilda or Pip. She and her mother had agreed one thing—that the fewer people who knew about Father's other daughter, the better Least of all did Mother want her sister to be told. It would only give Hilda a fresh chance to criticize the man with whom Connie had chosen to spend the rest of her life and for whom she had left Clifford Chatterley.

It was a curious thing but Clare found herself thinking a great deal about Sir Clifford when she got back to London She knew very little about him; only the odd story she had heard from time to time from her mother. But the arrival

of Gloria had destroyed what little growth there had been of new affection and feeling between Clare and her father. Somehow it had enlarged the disagreeable side of his background When Clare left Swanningdean she felt she really did not want to go down there and be involved with her half-sister in any way whatsoever She would help in any way she could but the less she saw of her parents and Gloria, the better.

As usual, Clare locked most of her distressful conflicting feelings deep inside her, and if she was a bundle of nerves and repression, nobody at the hospital guessed it She performed her duties calmly and steadfastly Her month of night-duty turned out to be so exacting, she was fully occupied. A large convoy of wounded arrived. Now wards were being opened up for the civilians seriously wounded in air raids—overflowing from civilian hospitals which were already packed

She was allowed no time to think of her personal affairs A flu epidemic was not making things easier and Clare found herself one night quite alone in her ward The senior Sister was coping with other wards as well as Clare's, owing to depleted staff. On two occasions the young V A D faced the emergency which is the nightmare all nurses have to deal with at times—two bad haemorrhages, one after the other. In the long run she had to call one of the M O 's, who himself, was rushed off his feet, and who was as tired and overworked as Clare They worked together to save the life of a young Tank Corps officer—once a strong, burly fellow—reduced now to a shattered wreck They achieved their object and when it was over and they were both washing their hands, the doctor apologized to Clare

"I snapped your head off, I'm afraid Sorry, nurse"

"Oh, that's all right. I know I gave you the wrong scissors"

He smiled at her as he wiped his hands on a towel.

"One forgets you girls are not trained nurses. You did a damned good job tonight. I thought you coped magnificently before I arrived"

"Thank you," she said.

The young doctor felt very tired Looking at the girl he saw that she, too, was exhausted She was very white with dark smudges under her eyes He had only been posted to

this hospital recently He didn't know her very well. Glorious-looking girl, he thought. Marvellous hair and skin. An interesting character . . . seemed quite unmoved by the dramatic events of the night. Reticent sort. He wondered what lay behind the cool façade. He remembered hearing something about a marriage that hadn't come off. He rather admired her but she was not his type. He liked them a little more "cosy". But he complimented her again on her work and walked away

After he had gone, she sat down suddenly just for the fraction of a moment and covered her face with her hands. Now it was all over, she was shaking Thank God the poor boy was out of danger now. It was nearly four a.m. Another two hours and Clare would be going round, taking temperatures and giving the early morning doses of medicine. Mustn't forget that poor Tubby was having his fifteenth operation tomorrow (No! *today.*) Still so cheerful, despite his disappointment at being unable to wear his artificial limb. He was the last one left of the old lot. She must say a special word to cheer him up.

She no longer felt that anything at Swanningdean Farm was of importance. How could it be, in the face of the dramas in a big hospital like this. What did her parents' unfortunate past, or her half-sister, matter? They were insignificant. There was a dreadful battle going on in the Atlantic; the new effort to safeguard convoys. The Allies had begun a violent air offensive over enemy territory. Each night there were bombers that "failed to return to their base".

She went back to the ward. As she did so the shrill warning of the siren pierced the silence of the dawn. Another air raid. No peace She went coolly from bed to bed talking to those who needed a word, giving drinks, punching up hot crumpled pillows. Not one of the men in the ward could have guessed that she was in the least fatigued

That month of night-duty was an arduous one and she was physically at a low ebb when it ended. But she had gained a certain spiritual comfort from her own earnest endeavour to fling herself wholeheartedly into her war work She was glad to get back to day-duty and to be able to sleep at night. She was a person who needed a lot of sleep It was April now and the days were lengthening and the

parks were full of spring flowers She went out when she wasn't working to get some fresh air and feel the sun on her face

She wrote dutifully to her mother—or phoned her—and, in order not to make a "thing" about Gloria, said that she couldn't get home because she was too busy; working week-ends as well now to take the place of one or two of the V A D s who had flu

Her mother seemed concerned only with the fact that her father had gone down with lumbago and could hardly move. It was so unlike him, he'd always been so well And only once, rather timidly, did Connie mention Gloria.

"She's settled in the cottage and I think she seems all right Dr. Cole says the baby should be born the end of this week"

With an effort Clare said politely:

"I hope she won't have a bad time Let me know what happens."

"You will come down sometime, won't you, Clare?" her mother asked

Clare went on with her good resolutions and answered:

"Yes, of course"

Meanwhile, not even Sister Evans could criticize Nurse Mellors She worked with unflagging zeal and did not spare herself a single job, no matter how unpleasant. Her friend, Elizabeth Peverel, remarked on her fervour

"What are you doing—trying to win the war alone?" one day she asked Clare humorously, as the two girls sat drinking tea in the nurses' sitting-room

Liz, as they called her, was a year older than Clare, quite attractive though a little too plump, but the men liked her because she had a cheeky face with snub nose and freckles, and was most amusing She had a talent for mimicry which kept the men laughing Her great performance was of Sister "Effing-Evans" on her rounds

Liz and Clare always liked each other although Liz had never found she could get close to the lovely redhead Liz was an extrovert and let everybody know what she was thinking and feeling She knew that Clare was the opposite. There had been a time when she had resented Clare's cool reticence and then one day when Liz had stopped giggling and gone around with red-rimmed eyes and a sniffle, Clare

had noticed it and asked the reason. Liz had confided in her. The boy she was going to marry—a bomber pilot—had been killed just before he was due home on leave. Clare had then changed from a casual acquaintance to a warm and sympathetic friend Liz could never forget how kind and thoughtful Clare had been and what trouble she had taken to try and make things easier during those first agonizing days of bitter loss. After that she adored Clare. She thought she understood her. Clare was a darling Liz had been disappointed when Clare's wedding was cancelled and had never really understood why. Clare had offered no explanation, friendly though she was, and Liz having failed to discover the truth, tactfully kept off the subject of Robin

But today she cautioned her friend about this sudden feverish effort to work too long and too hard

"What's got into you, Clare? Anybody would think you were trying to prove something."

"Perhaps I am, Liz"

"Tell me all I'm fascinated. You don't only do your own job. You even volunteer to do someone else's."

Clare smiled

"Maybe you're right—I'm trying to win the war alone," she said dryly

"Well, I like work but only up to a point," declared Liz. "And I don't see any object in killing oneself."

"I'm not doing that."

"Well, I don't understand you but I'm terribly fond of you," said Liz, "and I'm still hoping we can get leave together one day I do want you to come home and meet my brother, Francis. He paints as a hobby and I think he'd adore to paint you."

Elizabeth Peverel came from a very wealthy family with a big estate, up in Derbyshire. One of the things Clare most liked about Liz was her lack of "side". Her father, Sir Neil Peverel, was a famous historian and her mother, Lady Kathleen, was the daughter of an Irish peer. The brother Francis would one day inherit the baronetcy, but he was unfortunately unfit for military service and had to be content with doing an office job in his home town.

As the two girls sat there talking, it struck Clare for the first time that Liz, being from an adjoining county might

have heard of the Chatterleys. She had known Robin and his family.

Ever since Gloria arrived at Swanningdean, Clare had been haunted by the thought of Wragby.

Suddenly she interrupted Liz's gay chatter.

"Liz, does the name Wragby convey anything to you?"

Nurse Peverel turned and threw her friend a look of astonishment.

"Wragby? Good gracious, yes. My home, Long Endon, is only about five miles away from Wragby, which is the Chatterley estate."

Now Clare came alive and was full of awareness and an insatiable curiosity which drove her to ask more questions. Lighting a cigarette she stared through the smoke at Liz's freckled, cheerful face.

"Is he still alive—Sir Clifford, I mean?"

"Very much so. Why? Have you ever met him?"

"No," said Clare evasively, "but I've heard of him. I just wondered if *you'd* met him."

"Once or twice," said Liz. "He's rather an attractive man in a queer sort of way. Getting on, of course, in his early fifties. I heard my father saying when I was last home that it was amazing that Sir Clifford is still so strong and healthy despite the fact that he was so badly wounded in the last war. One sees him being driven around by his chauffeur from time to time and they lift him in and out of his wheel-chair. He used to hold Charity garden parties and fairs in his grounds before the war. He has a wonderful garden and is very proud of it. Now, of course, they've turned Wragby into a Convalescent Home for Officers."

Clare listened to this with deep interest. This might, she thought, be news to Mother. Quite a lot of the stately old homes were being turned into hospitals. Clare had no need to question Liz further for she was always a great talker and she rattled on without encouragement about Sir Clifford and Wragby Hall. He had snow-white hair, she said, always beautifully cut and brushed; very blue eyes in a rather red face. He was handsome in his way, with his broad shoulders, and always superbly dressed. Usually one saw him in his chair with a light plaid rug over his knees. Liz thought it was dreadfully sad that he should be paralysed. He had such a good brain.

"He and Daddy get on well," said Liz. "They're both interested in history, and Francis goes up and talks to Sir Clifford. Francis is mad about some of the paintings at Wragby. Sir Clifford has a beautiful Renoir, you know. The Red Cross run the convalescent home. Sir Clifford and his man-attendant and house-keeper live in one of the wings. He takes an active interest in everything. He has great courage, I think. Fancy you knowing Sir Clifford, Clare!"

"I don't," said Clare hurriedly, "I only know *about* him."

"Well, when you come to stay at Long Endon, I'll take you over to meet him."

"I'd like that," said Clare on an impulse. A curious tremor went through her. Then she half-regretted bringing up that fatal name of Chatterley because, as was inevitable, Liz touched on Sir Clifford's personal life

"My parents told me they felt so sorry for him . . . when he lost his wife years ago. I was an infant, of course. Lady Chatterley left him, you know."

Clare did not answer. She felt a hot, tight sensation in her throat Liz continued in her garrulous fashion

"She was called Constance—Mummy said that she was frightfully good-looking and rather sexy, and that she ran off with Sir Clifford's gamekeeper Mummy was scandalized. But you know, Clare, sometimes when I see Sir Clifford, although I think he's a lonely, tragic figure, one has to admit that Lady Chatterley had rather a bad break I mean, it can't be much fun for a young, vital woman to be married to a paralysed man when she's hardly thirty. She'd have to be a sort of cold fish, or the martyr type, to remain absolutely faithful to such a husband"

Clare felt positively sick and alarmed. She really could not let Liz say any more about Mother—whether she was "for" or "against" her. A girl could not listen to her mother being pulled to pieces—criticized—it was too disloyal. Besides, it wasn't fair to Liz

Clare was thankful when one of the sisters came into the room and told them it was time they were back in the wards

When Clare saw Liz again she seemed to have forgotten the subject of the Chatterleys. She did not reopen it. But that night Clare found it difficult to sleep She chewed over every word that her friend had said about Sir Clifford.

She felt more than ever divided from her own father, despising him for taking a helpless invalid's wife away from him. She kept wondering—thinking how different her life might have been if Sir Clifford, and not his gamekeeper, had been her father and how nearly it had been so.

Liz had suggested that any woman's natural desire for a physical life might overcome her loyalties and principles. She had even excused Mother. Clare wanted to, but couldn't understand how any woman could need the physical side of life as much as that. Yet as she lay awake through the long hours, the old tumult churned inside her. She could not deny the fact that she wanted to love and be loved but it was as though that part of herself was buried so deeply that nobody could reach it. Since she was adolescent the very thought of sex had drifted over her like a fog obscuring her natural affections and desires, thickening until desire itself was suffocated.

But in the dawn, Clare tiptoed into Aunt Hilda's kitchen, made herself a cup of tea, took an aspirin for her aching head and told herself once again that she must clamp down on this small private hell of hers.

Liz and the others might protest that she worked too hard Let them If she could not give herself completely to love, then she would give all she had to the war—to the hospital in which she served.

For the next week or two she was happy working, and derived a certain fulfilment from the joy of seeing those she nursed grow better; knowing that she helped to alleviate pain; watching, thankfully, the relief of a boy like Tubby when he got his artficial arm. He used it for the first time cracking jokes and putting it around Clare.

"Every bone, muscle and sinew in this 'ere arm thrills to the touch of your glorious beauty," he said dramatically.

One of the other officers called out:

"Now you've got the girl in your iron grip, kiss her, Tubby"

He did so, his cheerful face glowing Clare kissed him back with the tenderness all the nurses felt towards this very young officer who had suffered so badly, without a word of complaint. As he released her, Tubby whispered:

"I'll always remember that kiss. You've been marvellous to

me. I don't think I'd ever have got through without you, Nurse Mellors"

She was delighted. She left the hospital in a happier frame of mind But fresh trouble waited for her. Once she was back in the flat she found a note on the pad in Aunt Hilda's writing, telling her to ring a certain number urgently She didn't know the number but she dialled it. A man's voice answered.

"Hello, Beautiful Remember me?"

"No—who is it?" she began.

"Don't say you don't know my voice. I'd know yours anywhere It's like iced champagne with a kick in it"

Now she recognized the caller. She flushed angrily.

"Captain Binelli."

"Cas to you."

"What do you want?" she asked, not very politely She had not heard of Cas Binelli since he left the hospital although somebody had told her he was still on sick leave and around Town. He said:

"I want to see you."

"I'm sorry. I'm much too busy."

"You get time off, my dear"

"I'm too busy to meet anybody," she said coldly

"Don't come that Mount-Etna's-snowy-peak-stuff with me I know that fire lies under the ice."

"You're talking nonsense. Good-bye, Captain Binelli—"

"Wait," he interrupted. "I want to see you—I really do want to see you I've always been mad about you, darling. I've rung up several times but had no reply. Will you come out with me tonight?"

"I'm sorry, I can't."

"Darling, I don't intend to be put off. Tomorrow then?"

"I'm afraid not," said Clare firmly, and put down the receiver

Cas rang again. He rang three times that night Each time he talked on a more intimate note. Each time she hung up on him. It had been agreed with Matron at the hospital that she should always be on call in cases of an unexpected convoy of wounded and an emergency, so she dared not leave the telephone unanswered. She was sorry that Aunt Hilda and Pip were both out, otherwise they might have dealt with Captain Binelli. Pip might even have

found it fun. All men were "fun" to her. On the fourth call, Clare grew really angry.

"Please stop this, Captain Binelli. I've been working very hard all day in the hospital and I want some rest."

"Then come to my flat, darling. You can rest here with me."

"You must be mad."

"Perhaps I am. I've thought about you so much, it's become a madness."

She hung up, trembling. She could see Cas Binelli's dark, almond-shaped eyes and the way he used to look at her, slyly, hungrily, when he was in the ward. She couldn't bear him. She couldn't let him touch her. It was awful to think that some man wanted her like that—so brazenly, with such frank sensuality. She felt as though she was being mentally assaulted.

His suggestive insidious voice remained in her thoughts. She was nauseated yet unable to get away from those thoughts. And that was just one evening—only the beginning of the campaign. Cas Binelli continued to pursue her by telephone or by letter, day after day. She began to get the unpleasant idea that Cas Binelli was a little crazy. Certainly he was obsessed. She dreaded the letters and telephone calls. On one occasion, she said:

"If you go on like this I shall complain to the police—"

She heard him laugh.

"My darling beautiful Clare. There's no law against a man wanting a woman."

"But there is against this sort of persecution."

"I don't want to persecute you, darling, only to kiss you and kiss you until your lips kiss me back—"

"You're absolutely out of your mind—" she exclaimed and slammed down the receiver, her heart thumping in a most unpleasant way.

One day Aunt Hilda answered the phone and Cas hung up immediately. He did the same with Pip.

Then came an evening when Clare walked out of the hospital to begin the usual journey home and found Binelli waiting for her. She had wondered just when this would happen. He had been writing and telephoning her now for a solid week. She supposed he had done it to try and "soften her up". He was an immensely conceited man. But

if he thought that his ruthless pursuit of her would in the long run flatter her and draw her towards him, he was wrong. She had begun to feel more than just angry with him.

She tried to walk past Cas without looking at him but he caught her arm and held her. It was a clear, soft evening —the last day of April. So far the Air Raid warning had not gone It was a night that might have held enchantment with the Park so fresh and green and the sky a luminous blue But for Clare it was neither beautiful nor enchanted. She looked with revulsion at Cas Binelli. She supposed some women would call him good-looking. He was smartly dressed. His uniform was beautifully-cut, his trousers creased, his cap at a jaunty angle on his dark, Italian-looking head. But she hated his smug, suggestive smile, and the menace of the strong fingers that dug into her arm.

"Look here," she said, "you've been making one hell of a nuisance of yourself lately, Captain Binelli, and I've just about had enough."

"Is your patience exhausted, my beautiful?"

"You're mad."

"I admit it. Madly in love with you and I think you want me, too, only you just won't let yourself go."

Her large fine eyes flashed at him.

"Your conceit is too appalling I assure you I hate the very sound of your voice I tell you you've got to stop this persecution or I'm going to report it."

"Who to, may I ask?"

"Colonel Bankley," she said, mentioning the name of the officer commanding the hospital.

"That old buffer!" Cas laughed. "He has no control over me now I've left."

"Then I'll report you to the civil police."

"You're always threatening that, darling. Much better admit that you can't win."

"Win what? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Darling, I've told you You keep trying to fight yourself. It's no good. Your natural desires will win in the end."

She tried to drag her arm away from him. He put both his around her now and drew her tightly against him. The feeling of the man's tense body gave her a sensation of utter loathing.

"Let me go . . ."

"Not until you've promised to come to my flat and let me teach you what love can mean."

"Let me go . . ." she repeated, struggling. In despair she looked around She had come out of a side entrance. The road was empty There was not a soul in sight. Only an occasional car drove past. Cas Binelli must have known that all the nurses came out of this door.

He could feel her trembling. She seemed to him to have gained in beauty. She really was the most voluptuous creature. So many girls had said "yes" to Cas Binelli. This was the only one who consistently rejected him. He was determined to make her change her mind.

Now he put up a hand, turned her face towards him, and forced his lips down upon hers. It was a sensual kiss that she found hateful. The more she struggled, the more fiercely he held and kissed her.

Suddenly she was conscious not only of hatred but of terror. She began to believe that he really was out of his mind She made a desperate effort to free herself from his arms.

"Don't tell me you don't like those kisses," he said, his eyes gleaming. "Don't tell me you're so chaste. I'll never believe it."

Now she broke out hysterically:

"You sickening fool! Can't you understand that I don't want this sort of thing from *you*?"

"You can't say you don't want something you've never had Give me a chance"

"Oh, let me go!" she said furiously She felt fear again when his imprisoning hands barred the way to freedom and his lips explored her face and neck. Then with a feeling of tremendous relief she suddenly noticed a figure walking towards them. A tall, young woman wearing the uniform of an ambulance driver Clare didn't know who she was but called to her.

"Hello, there! Hi!"

With an oath, Cas Binelli let Clare go Her uniform cap had fallen off She picked it up, shaking. She now recognized the approaching girl as one of the hospital ambulance staff. She ran to her

"Let me walk with you, please. I want to get away from that man!" she said, breathlessly.

"But of course." The girl stared and wondered what was going on The V.A.D. looked scared to death. The man, whoever he was, had started to walk quickly away in the opposite direction.

Clare gave a shaky laugh.

"Sorry. I'm afraid I'm a bit het-up. Has he gone?"

"Yes Who was he? What happened?"

"His name's Binelli. He used to be a patient in my ward. I think he's a mental case."

"Was he trying to—"

"Yes, he *was*," said Clare bluntly.

"Poor you—you're trembling."

"I'll be all right. Thank goodness you turned up"

"My name's Jo Albiss," said the other girl. "I'm one of the ambulance drivers."

"Yes, I've seen you around. I'm Clare Mellors."

"I was just nipping round the corner to buy an evening paper," said Jo, "then I was going back to my flat I'm off duty now. I live quite near here. Why not come back with me and let me give you a drink. You've had a bit of a shock."

"It certainly was a shock," said Clare. Her nerves were just beginning to steady again. "That man . . . My God! He was *sickening*."

"I can't say I have much use for the male sex when they behave like that," said Jo Albiss.

She offered Clare a cigarette and lit it for her. Now Clare noticed that she had strong brown atractive hands and wore a signet ring. She was tall for a girl, about thirty. Much taller than Clare and of slim build. Her skirt was tight, and she wore a blue uniform shirt with a collar and tie Under the beret one could see that she had very short hair. It was brown, like her face. She had a deep tan as though she had been abroad, thought Clare, but it was more likely because she was always out of doors on her job, driving through all kinds of weather. She looked tough; rather handsome in a boyish way. She had warm, hazel eyes. They were smiling down at Clare with such friendly interest that Clare felt her horror of Cas Binelli vanishing. She was secure again.

"I'd love to come back and have a drink with you"

"Good" Jo took her arm "I'm sure we will have a lot in common and will find lots to talk about."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CLARE FOUND herself relaxing more completely than she had done for years in Jo Albiss's tiny sitting-room. It was a very small flat—this room, Jo's bedroom leading out of it, a kitchenette and one of those cupboard bathrooms with no windows and a four-foot-six bath When Jo showed it to Clare she laughed and said:

"You must wonder how I get my tall lanky frame into that I just about double up."

She talked easily and naturally to Clare, putting her quickly at ease

She had a passion for cars—in fact, she said, she had always been mechanically minded and used to drive a sports car Her other hobby was cooking. She was *Cordon-Bleu* trained Before the war, she told Clare, she gave wonderful parties and created quite fabulous suppers within the limitations of her apology of a kitchen. Now, of course, with rationing there were no more supper parties but she could still serve up frozen fish in a sauce that made people think they were in France She had a piece of fish in the fridge tonight She would cook it—do a special little meal for Clare after they had had a drink and a cigarette.

"I couldn't possibly put you to so much trouble—" began Clare Jo interrupted with an assurance that it was no trouble at all It would be great fun for her to have Clare here, as life was pretty lonely once she came off duty The nights seemed very long She liked working on the night-shifts best The great thing was to be busy and not think much *these* days.

"That's what I've been telling myself," said Clare.

The girls were sitting on either side of an electric fire. Clare sipped a gin-and-French and leaned back against a cushion which Jo had punched up and put at her back She had also slipped a needlework stool under Clare's feet.

"You just be thoroughly comfortable and let me fuss over you a bit," she had said.

Already Clare was feeling a good deal better. Her nervous system, set on edge by Gus Bucelli's attack on her, was quietening down. There was something very soothing about Jo Albiss. She certainly didn't "fuss" although she used the word. She was quiet and authoritative and did everything with assurance. She had changed out of her uniform and put on slacks and a thick blue fisherman's jersey. With her brown skin and thick short-cropped hair she looked like a tall boy. Nevertheless, she had a distinctly feminine understanding of what another woman needed. It was such a relief, thought Clare, not to have to be on her guard as was inevitable with a man who was sexually stirred by you. She felt very much at home with Jo Albiss and thought her a most unusual, charming woman.

Clare liked this little place, too. Jo said she had decorated it herself. It was right at the top of an old-fashioned block of mansion flats near the hospital. Two narrow windows looked out on the roof-tops opposite, no longer visible since Jo had drawn the black-out curtains before she switched on the table-lamp. The carpet and curtains were chestnut brown, the walls and paint a light grey. On one side of the room were shelves with books, on the other, a radiogram and a big pile of records. A small oil-painting hung over the fireplace. It was a head-and-shoulder study of a rather lovely young girl gazing upwards, with fair wind-blown hair. She was wearing a red jersey. Clare remarked on the painting when she first came into the room.

"What a striking portrait."

"She was a great friend of mine," said Jo.

"There's something fascinating about her pose—as though she were reaching up to the sun."

Jo Albiss looked away from the portrait, fetched an ash-tray and placed it beside Clare.

"She was killed in a crash the week before war broke out. She was just twenty-one. Poor darling—she lived too fast and she drove too fast and when she died I lost one of my greatest friends."

"How simply awful!" exclaimed Clare.

"We used to share a flat. I've lived alone ever since," said Jo.

"It must be awful to lose one's best friend like that."

"It was. Especially when it's the one person who seems to fit into your scheme of things I don't know what I would have done if the war hadn't come and given me a mission—I volunteered to drive an ambulance. That's helped. Now when I see all those dreadful casualties being lifted into the ambulances, I realise that one person's death more or less can't be of great account—just one—among thousands One becomes fatalistic—quite philosophical."

Jo seemed to have led an interesting life. Her parents had died when she was young, leaving her a small private income. She had been to London University and at one time had taught mathematics in a big girl's school But she had found the life too narrow. She had gathered her resources together and gone on a trip round the world. While in Norway she had met the director of a British firm exporting expensive cars. He had wanted to marry her but she had turned him down. Nevertheless, he had remained friendly and been interested in her special ability to drive—her almost masculine knowledge of mechanics. When she got back to England he gave her a job—testing sports cars for him Sue, the girl in the portrait, also worked for the firm and they had become friends doing everything together until that fateful day when Sue had bought a new sports car and brought it down from Coventry.

"I always blame myself She was standing in for me as I was laid up with flu She took my place"

"You can't blame yourself!" said Clare. "It was just fate. All the same I know how you must have felt."

"Let's stop talking about me Tell me about you," smiled Jo, and leaned forward to hand Clare an open packet of cigarettes Once again as she lit the cigarette for Clare, the latter noticed the beautiful shape of Jo's fingers and her signet ring She was an intriguing person.

"Perhaps you don't want to refer to that creature you were embroiled with when I came along," said Jo, "but if you want to tell me about it, I can assure you it won't go further, my dear."

"I was just thinking that I could tell you *anything*," said Clare.

And feeling so unusually relaxed, she was able to talk to

Jo Albiss not only about Cas Binelli but about Robin and so inevitably about her family

Jo nodded in sympathy now and then but said little She kept her rather deeply-set eyes turned upon Clare with an expression of concentration and interest. Once she got up to refill Clare's empty glass and pour another drink for herself. Once, because it was getting hot in the little room, she switched off one of the bars of the electric fire. Clare finished

"So you see I'm all mixed up. Life seems to have been pretty difficult lately, What do *you* think, Jo? Am I at fault somehow and not my parents?"

"Far from it. You have all my sympathy. Had I been in your place I'd have felt just as you do."

"Do you mean that?" asked Clare eagerly. She found it both flattering and soothing that this charming sensible woman should be in agreement with her.

"I do indeed"

"Don't just say so because you think it's what I want to hear."

Jo smiled.

"I'm not like that, my dear I always say what I mean. You see, I happen to have a nature very like yours—that's why I understand so perfectly."

"How d'you mean—a nature like mine?"

"I mean that I have always felt the need, and at times a very urgent one—to love and be loved. But the moment a man gets too close—it's never been any good to me. You mention this queer dark tunnel and that you are frightened of what waits at the other end So was I, always. I was brought up by an aunt who told me absolutely nothing about sex, and when I was sixteen-and-a-half and rather tall and well-developed for my age, a man made a sexual assult on me. I ws physically very strong and I got away from him before any harm was done, but it had a grim effect I can assure you. I shied away from men from that time onwards. I like the company of men now and again—I'm very good friends with some of them—but once they start this business of sex—I'm through"

"But we're fundamentally different," said Clare. "I *do* want to get married and have children one day But I can't seem to meet a man who attracts me enough to make me want

him the way he wants me. I *want* to steer a normal course. When I try, I always seem to go on the rocks"

"Poor darling," said Jo and her eyes pitied the young girl opposite her She looked very young and fragile, and very tired. And so very beautiful, not unlike the girl in the painting Clare had the same stirring beauty.

Jo lit a fresh cigarette and said:

"Tell me more"

"There isn't much else. I've just got to carry on and hope that I don't get involved in incidents like tonight. That was enough to put anyone off men for good!"

"Take my advice and cut men right out of your life," said Jo. She grinned at Clare. "I find I'm happiest in the company of my own sex."

"Oh, of course, I've got my girl friends, too. I'm terribly fond of Elizabeth Peverel who's one of the V.A D s at the hospital And I've got other friends who were at school with me of whom I'm fond. But to a woman, surely women friends can only be incidental. I suppose the natural target is a man and marriage."

Jo had a nervous habit of flicking the ash from her cigarette with the tip of her little finger. She did this now, glancing in a rather secretive fashion at Clare.

"Hard to tell what the natural target is," she said.

"But I think it's wonderful being up here with you tonight," went on Clare, naively. "Don't for a moment imagine that I don't like being with girl friends."

"You're very sweet," said Jo. "And I assure you it means a lot to me to have you here. I fully expected to spend my usual evening alone. Now I'm going to get you some food"

"I don't want you to trouble—"

"It'll be no trouble at all It will be an enormous pleasure to me Just sit here and relax. Go to sleep if you like I'll put on a record"

The next moment, Clare found herself lying with her head against a cushion, drowsy, content, listening to the exquisite melody of the Quintet from the Meistersingers. Jo appeared to like Wagner. He might be a German composer and the favourite of Hitler and his cronies, she said, as she went into the kitchen chuckling, but what did she care. There should be no nationalities, no boundaries in great music or of any kind of art.

Clare listened to the Quintet against the background noise of running water and the pleasant chink of china and glass and cutlery in the kitchenette. Soon an intriguing odour drifted into the room and assailed her nostrils.

"Hope you're getting up an appetite. It's almost ready," sang out Jo

She's a nice person. I do like her, thought Clare.

It was a long time since she had felt so "cherished" by anybody It was quite different from Mother's "fussing" and constant probing into her innermost thoughts. Aunt Hilda was too busy to do any cossetting, and young Pip was interested only in herself. After the long hours of nursing, followed by that ghastly scene with Cas Binelli, it was quite heavenly up here with Jo. She proved a first-rate cook as well as a sympathetic friend Clare tucked into the fish which was disguised by one of Jo's wonderful sauces, drank some white wine—a rare treat—and then settled down with Jo to excellent coffee.

"I think you're terrific!" she said after Jo had cleared away.

Jo gave her a quick look, smiled, frowned, then studied the red point of her cigarette. "I think you're the perfect guest," she said and held out a hand.

Involuntarily, Clare took it. Jo held her fingers for the fraction of a second then dropped them and moved to the window She said:

"Switch off the lamp for a moment. I want to draw the curtains, Clare"

Clare obeyed. Jo drew back the curtains. A flood of white moonlight suddenly filled the little sitting-room with bold brilliance She muttered:

"Bomber's moon. My God, what a night for a raid."

"There hasn't been a warning—" began Clare But before she could even finish her statement the sound of the sirens rose from all directions, shattering the silence, disturbing the peace, chilling the spirit

"Oh, blast it!" sighed Clare "There they go!"

Jo pulled the curtains together again and Clare switched on the light. Then Jo threw her cigarette into the grate. She looked down at the younger girl.

"I was just going to suggest taking you home but now you'd better stay," she said, curtly.

Clare was rather taken aback by this. She, too, stood up.

Her rebellious hair had fallen from its pins and was hanging in a rich coil down her back. She had taken off her uniform collar and tie and loosened the band of her skirt, for comfort, while she rested in the big chair. She began to hook up the skirt again. She felt puzzled as to why Jo had been about to take her home. It was still very early in the evening Had she said anything to upset her? She had thought they were getting on so splendidly. Maybe Jo was tired and wanted an early night.

"I don't mind about the raid. I'm used to them. I'll nip into the Underground," she said

"No, please don't," said Jo sharply. "I wouldn't dream of letting you go out in this Just listen to it!"

'It' was the first boom of anti-aircraft fire. Clare who knew it all so well could visualize it, the searchlights crossing each other, probing the star-lit heavens; the flashes of gunfire, the sudden scream of fire-engines and the clanging of ambulance bells.

"I'm glad you're not on duty tonight," she said to Jo

Jo came and stood beside her. She threw an arm lightly around Clare's slender shoulders.

"I'm glad, too. It's nice to have somebody with me up here. You don't want to go down to the air-raid shelter, do you? I'm one of those who believe that if my name's on a bomb—nothing I can do can alter it."

"I agree".

"Well, let's put on another record and finish that bottle of wine"

"Okay!", said Clare.

She felt happy and relaxed again. Jo put on something a little lighter than Wagner. Delius . . . sad, wistful, full of tenderness This time she pulled a hassock up to the fire and sat on it nearer Clare instead of in the opposite chair

"Do tell me more about yourself, my dear," she said.

"Haven't you heard enough? You know it all now. Incidentally, do you feel at all sorry for my parents having such a contrary daughter?"

"Not at all. It's you I'm sorry for. If you'll forgive my saying so, they seem utterly egotistical, wrapped up in this great passion that shipwrecked your mother.

"You think she *was* shipwrecked?" asked Clare, curiously.

"Yes. I think she'd have done far better to stay with her

first husband. But then I like people who can talk intelligently and offer one mental companionship. I can quite see how her passion for your father nauseates you."

"I'm glad you understand, Jo. I was beginning to wonder if I was the 'odd' one," Clare sighed.

"Poor little mixed-up kid," Jo said, and again put out a hand to Clare, who took it casually. Jo held Clare's slim fingers longer this time.

There was something about the older girl that still puzzled Clare. Jo Albiss seemed to be rather a contradictory character. She talked as though she disliked emotion or romance. Yet in a funny way she *was* emotional. She liked to hold hands, to be affectionate in an almost school-girl fashion. It seemed especially curious to Clare who had never been very demonstrative with other women.

The raid was obviously a bad one. The anti-aircraft gunfire sounded closer. Suddenly a bomb dropped so near this square that the china and glasses on Jo's shelves rattled. The door leading into the kitchenette swung open.

Jo dropped Clare's hand. Clare thought she was losing a little of her composure. She smoked one cigarette after another and kept taking sips of neat whisky. Clare had refused to drink any more. Yet she could have sworn that Jo was not nervous of the raid. She couldn't be—she who drove ambulances through the worst of them. What was the matter with her?

"Blast these raids," Jo muttered.

"I'm sorry I foisted myself on you," said Clare.

"I've already told you I don't want you to go"

"Well, it so happens that my aunt and cousin are not at home tonight. I would have been alone, there. They've gone down to stay with Aunt Hilda's doctor and his wife."

Jo came across the room and stood there smoking her cigarette staring down at Clare, with her handsome disillusioned eyes.

"Cousin Pip as beautiful as you?"

"I'm not really beautiful."

"You are, you know."

"I'm not," protested Clare, embarrassed. "Anyhow, Pip's petite and dark and has all the qualities I envy. Everything's on the surface with her. No complexes, no anxieties or neuroses. She adores the opposite sex and they adore her."

"How simple!" said Jo, sneering slightly.

"Oh, I agree! I repeat—I envy her."

"You needn't. She sounds too shallow. You have depth. You're not promiscuous. To some girls, men are the beginning and the end of existence. I find that pathetic. You're selective I'm sure you've no wish to give yourself to these conceited idiots who think they can get any woman they want—when they want"

She sounds bitter, thought Clare *I'm not as bitter as that. I'm sure I'm not. I don't think I hate men the way Jo does at all.*

Aloud she said:

"Yet I do *want* to give myself . . ." Her cheeks burned. "I mean I want to . . . but I just can't bear to be rushed"

Jo turned from her She made no answer. She put on another record.

Clare didn't even hear what it was. A sudden crash too near this time to be pleasant, shook the whole building. The glass in both the windows of Jo's sitting-room shattered. Simultaneously the lights went out

Clare, temporarily thrown off her equilibrium, floundered around in the dark and called out:

"Jo—Jo—!"

At once she felt the older girl by her side and a protective arm around her shoulder, strong and reassuring.

"It's all right, darling We're still in one piece though it was a bit near, I must say."

Clare gulped and laughed

"I'll say it was. I hope to God it hasn't fallen on our hospital."

The girls walked to the window. They drew back the curtains. Through the jagged hole in the glass they could see the red light of flames shooting up in the air on the other side of the square. Thank goodness the fire was not at the hospital which was on the south side

Jo seemed more at her ease now and well able to deal with a crisis like this She made Clare feel feminine and dependent and able to leave everything to her. Within a few moments she had pasted sheets of paper over the windows, she drew the curtains again, found some candles and lit them and brushed up the broken glass. She was the epitome of cool efficiency.

"I must get hold of a glazier first thing in the morning," she said "Have another cigarette and a drink, Clare dear."

"It's a hell of a raid."

"Well, it's settled one thing in my mind," said Jo, "You're not going back alone to your flat tonight. You're staying here with me."

She would not let Clare say "no". And Clare did not really want to refuse. The bombers were coming over in waves—one raid succeeded another. It was one of the worst Clare could remember. Poor London, she thought! poor creatures who were crushed out of recognition by falling masonry and timber, or blown to pieces. No matter how brave you were, you couldn't exactly say you liked being in this sort of raid, or that it didn't make your throat feel dry and the sweat break out on the palms of your hands. But Clare admired Jo. She seemed quite determined not to have her evening spoiled by the Luftwaffe, she said, and continued to put on records; made some more strong coffee and laughed and talked to Clare until long past midnight.

Clare was thankful to be with her. At two o'clock in the morning the All Clear sounded. The starry night returned to its former peace except for the conflagrations burning steadily now in various parts of the city.

Clare allowed herself to be completely organized by Jo. She had to admit that Jo seemed to know exactly what she most needed. A hot bath—even a big hot towel, warmed by Jo in front of the fire and tossed to her when she was ready for it. Perfumed essence to make the water especially tempting and fragrant . . . (a left-over, Jo said, from before the war and bought in Paris). She had put fresh linen on the bed in her little room and in spite of Clare's protests finally tucked her up there.

"I'm used to camping out and I'm the sort who can sleep anywhere. I shall curl up on the sofa," she said.

Clare was a little bewildered by all this attention but grateful. She had never known anybody look after her as well as Jo did.

"You're absolutely marvellous," she said and snuggled down under the bed-clothes with a long sigh.

"I like looking after people," said Jo.

"You could jolly well teach a man how to look after his wife," said Clare sleepily. "But then no man could be quite

so self-effacing. As a sex they always want to get back as much as they give—if not more."

After which cynicism she shut her eyes She was terribly tired now. It was lovely in this warm bed. Lovely to know she hadn't to scramble home in the Underground For a long moment, Jo Albiss stood looking down at the girl. Clare was exquisite. Her long dark lashes were like little fans against the delicacy of her cheeks and the beautiful red-gold hair spread across the pillow. Then the lashes lifted. Clare smiled drowsily as she saw Jo still standing there.

"Sorry I'm not more talkative. I'm nearly asleep. Good night, Jo dear, and thanks a thousand times for everything"

"Thank *you*," said Jo. Her voice sounded rough and strange. She turned and walked out of the room, closing the door. Clare fell asleep.

When she woke Jo was beside her in her uniform, with a cup of tea for Clare.

She seemed to have no time to talk much this morning. She had overslept, she said, and had to go straight on duty. She was sorry she hadn't time to cook breakfast but Clare would find everything she wanted in the kitchen.

"Heavens, I'm glad you woke me," said Clare, springing out of bed. "It's time I was at the hospital."

Jo drew on a pair of leather gauntlets. Her face looked brown and rather hard this morning, Clare thought. She said:

"Will you come again tonight?"

"I can't possibly," said Clare, surprised. "I've got a date, I'm afraid."

"With one of your men friends?" Jo's voice sounded slightly sarcastic.

"No," said Clare. "With my V.A.D. friend, Liz. We're going to a cinema together."

"Can't you come back here afterwards"

"I'm afraid not, Jo. I must go home tonight. Aunt Hilda will be back"

"When will you come again?"

Poor Jo, thought Clare. She's terribly lonely.

"If you'd really like me to come and take your bed and make you so uncomfortable, I will very soon It's been great fun—" Then she stopped. She had taken off the coat of the white silk pyjamas that Jo had lent her and which were much too big for her. Jo was staring at her. Now Jo turned

and walked abruptly out of the room. Her voice carried back to Clare from the hall

"Come whenever you like. And make it soon, please. Good-bye."

"Bye-bye, Jo," Clare called back.

Jo was an odd creature, Clare thought, as she dressed hastily. But in her way most attractive and *wonderful* to be with.

Clare was in the kitchenette making a cup of coffee when she heard somebody in the sitting-room. She walked back and found a girl wearing W.A.A F. uniform standing by the door. She was small and fair and carried a uniform coat and zip bag. The two girls stared at each other.

"Oh, hello—" began Clare.

"Who the hell are you?" asked the W.A.A.F. rudely.

"Clare Mellors."

The W A.A.F. regarded Clare up and down with cool insolence.

"A nurse, I see."

"Yes, I work in the hospital just around the corner," said Clare, and spoke coldly now. She thought the W.A A.F. distinctly disagreeable. She had enormous saucer-blue eyes and a sulky mouth. Presumably an old friend of Jo's since she had walked into the flat in this fashion.

Clare was about to explain why she, herself, was here when the girl rapped out a question:

"Where's Jo?"

"Just gone on duty."

"You've been staying here the night?"

"Yes, d'you mind?" began Clare, annoyed. To her astonishment and dismay the W.A.A F. took a cigarette out of a pocket, tapped it against her thumb-nail and said in a loud voice:

"Yes, I do. I mind very much."

Nonplussed, Clare stared at her She felt her heart beginning to beat unpleasantly fast. What an offensive creature. Clare was surprised that Jo had such a friend. The W A.A.F. continued:

"Perhaps I'd better introduce myself. Flight Officer Monica Sturnham."

"Oh, yes," said Clare.

"Didn't Jo get my letter?"

"I really don't know anything about Miss Albiss's letters. And she didn't mention your name to me."

"Miss Albiss," repeated Monica Sturnham and laughed, and sticking her thumbs in the belt of her short blue uniform skirt, began to walk up and down the room. Her face was flushed, its prettiness wiped out by a very ugly expression. "Surely you call her Jo?"

"Perhaps I do, but—"

"How long have you been living here?"

"I don't live here. I only stayed last night because of the raid"

"Oh, so you stayed because of the raid. Jo put on her best protection act, I suppose. You're one of those sweet things who *need* to be protected."

"Look here," said Clare, up in arms and furious. "I don't know why you're talking to me in this tone, but I don't like it I think you must be out of your mind coming in here, and attacking a total stranger like this."

"Well—I'll tell you what *I* think about *you*," said the other girl "I think you're a bitch, to stay here with Jo, knowing just what she means to me and how things are between her and myself."

"I don't understand what you're talking about. I know nothing."

"I don't believe that I bet you Jo's told you the whole story, and if she didn't—then I'll tell you After *she* died . . ." Monica nodded towards the painting over the mantelpiece, "Jo was drinking too much and in a bad way and she met me and we teamed up. I helped her through it. Then because of some silly disagreement she had no further use for me and told me to clear out She said she didn't want anybody here in the flat with her any more. I went back to camp, but I've written her every day. I adore her. I'm not going to give her up. She lied to me. She said there was nobody else. So I find *you* here. But I'm not going to make it all that easy for Jo to throw me over and take you on . . ."

She carried on, talking so fast and with such incoherence at times that Clare could hardly make head or tail of what she was saying. Clare was flabbergasted. Monica Sturnham was behaving like a girl who had come and found another girl in her fiancé's flat. Yes, just as though Jo was a man she had been living with and she had arrived on the scene

and flown into a passion of rage and jealousy because she had found Clare here.

"I loved Jo. And I know she loves me. I won't let you take my place here!" Monica screamed the words, flopped on the sofa and burst into tears.

It was then, as Clare afterwards in a calmer moment told herself, that the "penny dropped". At last she realized what this was all about. She knew what Jo was. One of *those*. Her attention, the wonderful way she had cherished Clare . . . all that thoughtful care, sprang not from the normal desire for friendship but from perversion.

And if this girl Monica hadn't turned up this morning and opened her eyes, she Clare, might have come here again and laid herself open to a very much more unattractive scene—with Jo.

Now that Clare remembered the look in Jo's eyes and the way those long nervous fingers had grasped hers, she shivered, and she could almost have laughed with the irony of it. She, who had had sex flung at her in its natural form all her life, had never come up against this sort of thing before. It did not hold out one vestige of attraction for her. Whatever her attitude to the opposite sex, she could never, never find consolation with a person like Jo Albiss. The very thought of facing Jo again horrified Clare. Better Cas Binelli than that

Clare did not wait to have breakfast She put on her uniform, picked up her shoulder-bag and rushed out of the flat without saying another word to the W.A.A.F. Jo could deal with *her*. Clare had had enough.

A lot of windows had been broken in the flats last night. Glass littered the roads and pavements looked desolate and depressing in the early May sunshine. But Clare breathed in great gulps of fresh air. She felt the need of it As she reached the hospital, she told herself that she would take good care to keep out of Jo's way. Yet, when she had calmed down she thought how sad it was—what a pity Jo Albiss was as she was. Clare had liked her so much

What a ghastly mix-up life was for some people. Last night's episode and this morning's ugly scene with the W.A.A.F. had by no means helped to make Clare feel any happier or any nearer to sorting out her own problems.

PART II

CHAPTER TWELVE

CLARE DID NOT see Jo Albiss again except from a distance when she passed an ambulance Jo was driving But there was a note from her waiting in her pigeon-hole at the hospital the night after she had left Jo's flat.

> I undertand that M. turned up at the flat and made a scene so presume this is the end of our friendship. It might have been so wonderful. I can't tell you how unhappy I am. If you want to see me you know where I live.

Clare tore this up. She found it rather difficult to recover her sense of proportion after that unpleasant attack made by the W.A.A F Monica. As a rule Clare could not bear people to be unhappy but she felt no sympathy for Jo She certainly did not intend to see her.

In spite of all her hard work at the hospital and determined efforts to forget her troubles she felt desperately lonely She even missed the old days when she used to *think* she was in love with Robin and had looked forward to her marriage and its fulfilment. Life now seemed empty and meaningless Love was of vital, tremendous importance to a woman, without it nothing had much meaning.

She began to be morbid. She might be killed in a raid—die never having found the true perfect love that the poets wrote about She found herself praying with a kind of despair that she would meet the right man soon and that all her present bitterness and doubt would be swept aside.

She found herself envying people like Colin Talbot's wife, Evelyn. Life was so simple for her. She had married a charming man whom she adored. Clare only received one postcard from the Talbots while they were on honeymoon. She wondered how they were. Coincidentally, she had a long letter from Evelyn the very next day. It was rather a strained letter. She was still in the Wrens and had been posted to a faraway base in the Shetland Islands, so she was separated from her husband. Colin had made a marvellous recovery—complete but for an almost imperceptible limp, Evelyn wrote. After months in hospital he had chafed against inaction and with the help of a "high-up" relative at the War Office, he had managed to get back to active service and was actually serving abroad again—in Sicily this time where a new offensive was being organized by the Allies.

> I didn't want him to go but of course I understood how much he wanted to be back in the front line. And so thanks to this b—y war we're thousands of miles apart again I do hope things are good for you, dear Clare. Colin and I often talked about you . . .

Clare wrote back at once and told Evelyn that she was glad to be in touch and so sorry Evelyn was having to go through this horrible period of separation. Clare ended the letter:

> But I rather envy you having somebody to wait for. I just can't get up any enthusiasm for anyone I meet.

She worked without a break until Pip's birthday party was celebrated one Saturday night at the end of May. Pip was twenty-two. With her petite elfin prettiness she looked more like sixteen. It was not, however, quite such a gay night for Clare's cousin as Aunt Hilda had hoped. Pip was in love—really in love at last, so she told Clare, and to a married man in the Air Ministry. She was having an intensely serious affair and was in consequence subdued

Aunt Hilda gave the party for her at the Savoy. There were twelve of them dining and dancing But for Pip the evening was spoiled because her Air Vice Marshal could

not be asked Clare watched her dancing with one boy friend after another. There were a variety of them tonight, including two Free French officers. Pip drank a lot of champagne and laughed all the time, but Clare had never felt more sorry for her—or more fond of her Funny, she thought, how she felt so much more in sympathy with Pip now that she was unhappy. And she, alone in that party, knew that Pip had been in tears all last night because her adored A.V M was not finding it easy to meet her.

Pip had expressed desperation

"He wants me to go away with him for a week-end; that since we can't get married we can at least be as close together as possible for a little while."

Clare had argued against this fiercely.

"Don't go, Pip Don't do it You'll regret it all your life"

Pip, laughing and crying together, had accused her cousin of being "an old prude".

"I don't think you have any feelings—I don't think you understand what it means to want somebody as much as I want him."

Clare felt the old knife stab her heart.

"Perhaps that's true, but I do know that what you're contemplating is wrong—and not just on moral grounds It just *can't* bring anything but misery. You might both be marvellously happy for a while, but he's married, Pip, so it'll have to end Think of the regrets then and the *danger* . . ."

Inevitably Clare's mind had leapt to the thought of Gloria living down at Swanningdean in solitude and misery, awaiting her baby

"But you might be so much more unhappy," Clare had said, feeling suddenly older than Pip and very motherly She did her best to make her cousin promise not to go away with the Air Vice Marshal. In the end, Pip said she would "try not to".

Looking at Pip tonight at the Savoy, Clare felt very sad for her She looked so pretty in her rose-pink dress. Nobody would have thought she was so unhappy Earlier the orchestra had played "Happy Birthday To You", and everybody had drunk her health, nobody caring in the least that there was a raid on and that the bombs were dropping not very far away.

Clare became more than ever conscious of the difficult

dangerous days through which they were all living and the possible brevity of life.

She was dancing now with one of the Free French officers —Jaçques Mougins. He was an extremely good-looking young man with the olive skin and dark eyes and hair of the Midi. He came, he had told her, from Beaulieu. Like a true Monagesque he was gay, volatile and charming And like all Frenchmen, adept with flattery and full of that natural ability to make a woman feel that she was the most beautiful, the most wonderful in the world No doubt he made all women feel they were the only one, Clare told herself with a wry smile, but there was a warmth and friendliness about Jacques that could not fail to communicate itself to her. She found him easy to talk to. He spoke perfect English, having been partly educated in England He had been at Oxford studying languages and had intended to return to Paris and teach when the war had claimed him Since the collapse of France, which he felt bitterly, he had been with the Free French Army. He was at present on leave.

He talked easily, exclaiming how lucky he was to have been given the key of a beautiful little house in Chelsea; just off the King's Road. It belonged to the parents of his best friend, a young Englishman he had met up at Oxford His friend was now in the navy and his parents had gone down to Ross-on-Wye to get away from the raids. So Jacques had the house to himself. This meant he could spend his leave as he most liked, he told Clare, enjoying a complete "orgy" of music One of his great passions in life was the piano which he played, and his friends had left a glorious Bechstein behind them, being themselves musical.

"I play for hours and there is no one to mind or to hear me," Jacques told Clare.

"I'd love to hear you play," she said

"I would love to play for you." His bright dark eyes turned upon her with lingering admiration He added. "Do you know that you are very beautiful, Clare? The most beautiful girl I have yet seen in this country But then I have always had a weakness for red hair, and yours is not ordinary red—it has golden lights in it Superb!"

"You flatter me, Jacques," she laughed One couldn't help liking him He had great charm, and a most disarming smile. Besides, he danced like an angel. She had never

known what it was to dance as she did with Jacques They seemed to be having most of the dances together

Clare had to admit she was thoroughly enjoying tonight and Aunt Hilda kept giving her benevolent little glances and nods, meaning to imply that she was glad to see her niece having such a good time.

"When I first saw you, Clare," Jacques went on, "you reminded me of a reproduction Rossetti painting I bought when I was up at Oxford. You probably know the one—the tall slender girl in white with a lily in her hand and her long red hair unbound You have that same Rossetti look with your classic features and those big eyes with the carved lids and wonderful mouth."

"But no lily in my hand," laughed Clare.

"No, no lily," Jacques also laughed softly, "but you have the white dress *Mon Dieu*, I would like to see you with all your hair flowing down your back"

She felt warm and relaxed in his company. It was suddenly as though she had been swimming in dark turbulent waters and had surfaced and found the sun She was wearing a new dress, white crepe, tight-fitting, showing the slim lines of her waist and hips, and with a halter neck, leaving her arms and back bare Her hair was drawn back as usual into a coil at the nape of her neck. Pip had pinned a white camellia to her hair just over one ear.

The young French officer thought she was the most languorous and fascinating girl to have come his way. He could all too easily fall in love with her. But being a student of human nature and of women in particular, it did not take him long to realize that this girl was different from the others When they were dancing it was perfect—cheek to cheek they moved around the room enjoying every number, in perfect unison, their steps well matched Then he thought she liked him more than a little He could feel her heart throbbing against his and her fingers twining a little feverishly around his hand She seemed to give herself to the dance—and to the moment. And when he touched her hair with his lips and murmured: "*Chérie . . . tu es vraiment mignonne . . .*" she did not draw back but looked at him through her lashes with lazy, charming acquiescence. But the moment he held her slim young body a little closer

against his own, she seemed to draw away from him. Something about her seemed unassailable.

It was intriguing to Jacques. His own love-life had always been very simple—just one lovely girl after another. He certainly did not intend to get married for some time and his affairs were never serious. But Clare was different. He found her much more interesting and exciting than any of the other girls in this party—and her complete lack of coquetry intrigued him.

"When this party ends, let me drive you home, Clare."

Normally she might have thought.

"Here goes! They're all the same!" But she didn't with Jacques Mougins She felt a pleasant thrill at the thought of being taken home by him—of being quite alone with him for a little while

Soon after one o'clock the party broke up and Jacques took her back in a taxi to the flat. He paid off the driver and in the darkened deserted entrance to the block he drew her into his arms and kissed her. Although his kisses were passionate, he made no further approaches and she liked him even more when after a few moments, he drew back from her and said he should allow her to go to bed.

"You're half asleep, *cherie!*" he said tenderly. "Let me call for you tomorrow—we could enjoy a whole evening together."

On an impulse she accepted the invitation and found herself looking forward to it all day while she worked.

And she did enjoy her evening—first at an amusing French film showing at a tiny cinema she had not known existed—and later eating an extremely good meal at Prunier's—Jacques was very much a connoisseur of good food and wines Once again he took her home and paid off the taxi, staying a while to kiss her good night, this time remaining a little longer. Her liking for him grew and she looked forward eagerly to their next meeting at the week-end when he planned a day on the river at Henley When he suggested she should go back with him to his little house in Chelsea to play the piano to her, she agreed at once without hesitation She felt extraordinarily relaxed and happy in his company He was very gentle and yet masterful—took complete charge of her and, she told herself wryly, of her emotions, too. She felt a new person—full of the joy of life,

buoyant and delighted that in Jacques she had found someone so sympathetic. He was so masculine and so *right* after the episode with Jo Albiss which had left an unpleasant taste in her mouth To be natural—to be attracted to a man—to feel oneself falling a little in love—that was something she had not experienced since those early days when she had imagined herself close to Robin She felt eager and adventuresome when finally Jacques drove her through the fine May night to the little house in Chelsea. He explained that a daily maid cleaned it for him and he went out to his meals. It was beautifully furnished His friends were obviously artists, and the atmosphere was "just right" for Clare in her present mood. The little drawing-room on the first floor with two balconied windows had a deep sofa at right angles to an electric log fire which Jacques switched on as soon as they went in There were plenty of books, an open grand piano and thick yellow satin curtains shutting out the starry night. For a pleasant change there was peace in the sky. The raiders had gone home early.

Jacques took off Clare's coat, and as he did so dropped a little kiss on the nape of her neck She shivered and bit her lip. It was a long time since she had felt a sheer physical delight at the touch of a man's lips He made no attempt to "rush her" even now when they were alone He was obviously an artist, as a lover and content to bide his time He went downstairs, made coffee and brought it up to her While she drank it he played to her, very softly, so as not to disturb the neighbours Fortunately, the houses on either side were empty so there was nobody really to bother about

He chose Chopin which Clare adored, and played well. Then he drifted into Debussy.

When he turned round on the stool he saw that the girl was lying on the sofa with her head against a cushion, her eyes shut

"Are you asleep?" he asked softly.

She opened her eyes and smiled at him.

"No, of course not. I listened to every note But it's so soothing—I feel so absolutely content—I haven't felt like this ever before that I can remember."

He came and sat down beside her, took one of her hands and raised it to his lips, brushing the palm with little gentle kisses.

"My beautiful lily-girl—tell me something. Why are you afraid of love?"

He saw her colour and a little frown wrinkle her forehead. Surprisingly, Clare found herself confiding in him—telling him about Robin and how she had begun to think it was her fault rather than her fiancé's that everything had gone so wrong. When Jacques suggested that her parents had perhaps warned her too often against the dangers of an affair, Clare laughed ironically, telling him how completely opposite was the case. If anything, it was their emphasis on the delights of sex that had somehow aggravated her dislike of it.

"It isn't that I'm afraid, Jacques. I just don't seem to want to be made love to completely."

He half-shut his eyes and went on playing with her hand.

"My very right-and-proper English Clare. She calls it 'making love completely'. She's afraid to mention the word sex You know *très chère*, in France we make an art of love. But we do not think as so many Englishmen do that it is only a man who can enjoy the ultimate of passion. We believe that no man can really enjoy it unless the woman wants it every bit as much."

She nodded. She did not find it awkward to talk about such things with Jacques. He seemed so thoroughly to understand everything. Gravely she asked him a question:

"What happens when the woman *doesn't want it*?"

He dropped her hand and drank his own coffee which had grown cold.

"Now you are suggesting that some women are incapable of feeling desire I don't believe this is true. I think that the sex urge is in *everybody*. In some it may be maladjusted, perhaps, or ruined by wrong handling. In others it is so deep down that it needs a lot of understanding and patience to find it. But I do not believe that there lives or breathes a man or woman who is quite sexless."

"But Jacques, can you explain this? I enjoy being kissed—but beyond that—"

"Kisses, my dear, will not always be enough," he broke in. "Kisses are a charming preliminary—that is all."

"For me it seems to have been more than enough," she said in a low voice, "and yet—"

"Yes, you *know* there is more to love-making than that,"

he finished for her, and kissed her hand again, whispering: "You have a divine perfume. I called you a lily—you *are* rather like a flower Unopened. *Mon Dieu, if the flower were mine* "

She knew exactly what he meant. Now his gaze held hers and she did not look away Her whole mind suddenly demanded surrender It would be such a blessed relief to know that she was not neurotic, or cold or abnormal in some way like Jo. She felt a sudden violent longing to let Jacques prove that she could enjoy love, discover at last its true power and attraction.

"Jacques, Jacques," she said on a low, throbbing note, and felt her rapid heartbeats in tune with her own voice.

He drew her into his arms and with one hand deftly loosened the pins of her hair. As it tumbled down he pulled it around and kissed her through it, then found her lips in a long, silent caress.

When he lifted his head, she lay against him still warm and yielding and he whispered·

"I want you so much, my little flower."

"And I want you to make me *want* you," she whispered back

He drew back, shaking his head

"You are sure of this, darling? With your body as well as your mind? I wonder!"

"Yes, yes, with my body too," she said breathlessly.

"Are you sure? I am afraid for you Are you not saying to yourself 'I will give myself to Jacques. He shall prove all is well with me' and at the same time, fear that I may fail? You *are* afraid." He put his hand against her heart "I can feel your heart beating like a scared little bird's. You are all tensed up and nervous."

"Oh, Jaques, *please!*"

But his warm dark eyes looked at her almost with compassion he stroked her hair

"No, my darling For me to make love to you now would be a *grande bêtise*

She trembled violently, her arms about him, her eyes pressed to his shoulder.

Was he right? Was this madness? A mood of the moment she would regret tomorrow? Yet who better than a man with Jacques' wonderful understanding to teach her how to love?

"But I'm sure I want you. I'm sure I do."

He kissed her mouth.

"Because you like my kisses. Well, there's an art in kissing, of course. See, this is how a child kisses its parents—" He gave her a light peck on both cheeks which made her smile. "And this is how two friends kiss . . ." He brushed either side of her face a little more warmly . . ." He gave her a long, deep kiss and forced her lips apart. "This is how a man kisses the woman he desires."

Clare returned that kiss passionately. Jacques was so tender, so gentle, it was easy to respond to him.

Jacques felt her strain against him. After a moment he ran his hand down her bare shoulders to the curve of her spine and rested it in the hollow of her waist. She shut her eyes. His touch was soothing—exquisitely so. She gave a sigh of pleasure. He put both arms around her and drew her down so that she lay full length on the sofa. He lay beside her. She made no protest when his hands moved from her waist up to her breast. Then he began to kiss her, this time more fiercely. A long shiver of pleasure thrilled her whole body She felt a deep need to be closer still to him. The young man's face was changed now by desire, pale, severe, but with wide-open eyes. He said:

"Now you begin to want me—as a woman wants a man, do you not?"

Yes, she thought triumphantly. *I do. I want this tingling excitement to go on for ever. It's going to be all right. Jacques understands the right way . . . for me . . .*

In that moment she was all desire, her whole body alive to sensation, full of expectancy. Quickly and skilfully he unhooked her dress and drew it down. Then he left her and went out of the room. When he came back he, too, was undressed and he wore only a dressing-gown.

She looked up at him and in an instant the old horror gripped her, completely smothering all desire. Disappointment, bitter and intense, replaced her expectancy. She quickly drew the dress that he had taken from her right over herself as though to hide the beauty of her own body. Jacques stood there absolutely silently staring down at her. His cheeks had reddened then he had gone white again. He clenched his hands. The sight of her changed attitude might have humiliated or even angered him, had he not

known about her past experience with Robin. He knew that when he'd left her, she had been ready for love. Now it was the last thing in the world she desired.

He sat down beside her.

She was covering her face with her long beautiful hands. He drew them gently away and forced her to look up at him.

"So you think I am like the others—just a monster wanting to assault you? You didn't really want me?" he asked quietly.

She burst into tears. He let her cry, her face buried against his shoulder. Gently, he stroked her hair. He heard her broken voice.

"I'm so sorry. It was unforgivable of me. You were so sweet to me. Jacques, Jacques, why don't you hate me? I'm so ashamed of myself."

He went on stroking her hair.

"*Chérie,* you were not to know and nor was I. Please don't be so distressed. Obviously there is a reason for this. My appearance has never distressed other women, but it did you," he smiled. "Can you tell me why?"

She turned and looked up at him, her face wet with tears.

"There is no reason. I suppose I'm just odd."

"I still don't believe it, Claire. What has frightened you so much?"

"I'm not frightened. I've just been . . . so revolted."

"Because your parents are in love and have not concealed their desire from you?"

"No, not only that. It was something that happened when I was about thirteen. I've never told anybody before. But you're *so* understanding, I can tell you."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"IT WAS summer-time down in Sussex on our farm," said Clare, "I was in the hayfield. The hay had all been cut but there was still that lovely warm sweet smell in the air and

I was happy to be alive. Then I heard someone laugh—a girl's laugh, then a man's I looked around but I was alone in the field and then I realized there must be someone on the other side of the haystack. I thought perhaps some people were picnicking—they weren't supposed to picnic on our land but they often did. I walked over with a child's meaningless curiosity, I suppose, and as I drew nearer, I heard a soft moaning. Then I was frightened. I imagined it might be a murderer—oh, I don't know what I thought—but I was terrified and yet even more curious."

"So?"

"So I went round the haystack, slowly, quietly, because I was afraid There was a girl lying there—I knew her—her name was Kitty and she was one of the farm girls and no more than fifteen. She was naked—what you could see of her There was a man with her, a labourer I knew him vaguely. It was the first time I'd ever seen a man making love to a girl. I don't think they saw me at first. I wanted to move forward and help Kitty but I was too scared. Then she laughed and kissed him and I couldn't understand. Then *he* turned and saw me I just bolted Ran like mad. They didn't follow me. I was so upset I hid in a hedge until dark, crying my eyes out. Then I went home."

"And you told no one?"

"Yes, I told my mother She wanted to know why I was so late home and why I'd been crying My face and hands were scratched by the brambles in the hedge where I'd hidden myself I suppose she thought someone had attacked me. When she finally understood what I was telling her, she seemed relieved and she told me I was just a 'silly little goose' She said it was silly to get so worked up about something that was perfectly natural and even beautiful My God—*beautiful!* She told me all men and women did this—that this was how babies were conceived She told me to forget about it and that in a few years time I'd understand better and want it just as Kitty did"

Claire got up now. Her tears had dried She was quite calm

She took the cigarette Jacques had lit for her and inhaled deeply She went on:

"Maybe if Mother had told me it was wrong, and been angry with Kitty, I might have been able to forget. You see,

those two had looked so guilty when they saw me watching them They knew I had caught them doing something shameful and wrong Kitty had shouted at me as I ran away. 'Don't you go sneaking on me, young Clare, or . ' I didn't hear what she threatened to do to me The boy afterwards used to see me round the farm when he was feeding the chickens or I went down with Father to see the new piglets He looked guilty and turned away In my child's mind I decided that he had done a dreadful thing Yet my mother told me all men and women did it"

She stopped a moment Jacques said nothing but let her go on

"Later I went into my mother's bedroom to look for a hair-slide I'd lost I remember it just as though it were yesterday. I wanted to wear the slide that afternoon My mother had been 'resting' I saw her in bed—I could see she hadn't any clothes on Father was getting dressed. He gave me the same look Alf the farm boy had given me—an anxious sort of look, but not guilty the way Alf's eyes had been I knew then that they'd been doing the same thing—Father and Mother—this thing all grown-ups did Mother spoke to me rather sharply She said 'Don't stand there staring at your father Anyone would think you hadn't seen him without his clothes on before now' Well, I had of course, but not since I was tiny I suppose I hadn't paid much attention to the difference between Mother and Father then—I was too young Now I saw him as I had seen Alf. I minded more about Father than Alf Alf was only one of the farm hands and he couldn't really touch my life, any more than Kitty did But Father was part of me, head of my family I hated him for doing this thing to Mother and hated her for wanting him to do it Sometimes in the evenings at home she spoke to him in a special voice Father would say. 'Shall we have an early night, Con?' and Mother would smile and say. 'I'll be up in a minute or two, dear.' *I knew what she meant, what he was going to do, what she would let him do*"

"*Tu étais trop jeune*, too immature!" Jacques spoke now very sadly

"You mean, I'll never be able to—to let a man make love to me?"

"*Je ne sais pas!*" Jacques shrugged his shoulders with a very French gesture "Perhaps it would have been all right

if I had not undressed If we had stayed as we were and I'd turned out the lights, you might not have been afraid or reminded of this Alf or your father Now I think it is too late with me Always you will see me as you did just now. Perhaps some other man will succeed where I have failed"

But I wanted it to be *you*—I like you so much and it's never been so nearly right before. If it couldn't work with you, then it'll never be possible!" she exclaimed, her face puckered.

The Frenchman's face looked tired and almost old He had a kindly heart and he knew that something was very wrong with this young girl's outlook It must be a painful experience for her to see each love that she touched shrivel up suddenly and die before it had time to blossom But he had his own life to worry about and it had not been a happy occasion for him—for this was his first failure with any woman

"Get dressed, *chérie*," he said quietly, "and I will take you home"

She did not say one word during the drive back to the flat but when he tried to kiss her good night she shrank back

"No—no—" she began, her face all screwed up like an unhappy child's

All he could do was to lift her hand to his lips and whisper:

"Try to get over this thing that torments you and to forget the past, *pauvre enfant*."

When Clare got to her own room she was shaking with nerves and misery. Fully dressed she flung herself on to her bed and hid her face on her pillow. It had been such a marvellous evening and she had liked Jacques so much. But it hadn't worked. Tonight she felt complete despair

At the hospital the next day she was tense and uncommunicative even to her friend, Liz Finally she snapped at Liz The other girl took offence and walked off in a huff

"I really don't know what's got into you, Clare," she grumbled

Clare had no answer She felt this morning that there was no answer to anything in her life. Even Tubby, her favourite patient, caught the sharp edge of her tongue that morning when he tried to say something frivolous.

"I'm busy!" she said

The boy looked at her and saw that her cheeks were coloured and her eyes rimmed with red and that she was quite unlike his beautiful, calm, helpful nurse.

"Gosh!" he thought, "what's got into *her*?"

Clare went through her work like an automaton She ate nothing either for her lunch or her tea She felt positively ill when the time came for her to go off duty Her eyeballs smarted, her head ached and she had a fit of shivering that she couldn't control She really didn't know whether it was all nerves or a sudden chill, and she didn't care The failure with Jacques had upset her much more than she realized

Until now, she had been able to convince herself in moments of self doubt that she would react normally if she were to find the right man Well, no man could have been more gentle, understanding, more wise than Jacques If she could not accept him as a lover, she was forced to face the fact that she was unlikely ever to achieve a normal relationship with any man She could no longer hope that all was well with her, she thought desperately—and even if there were not this terrifying thought to face, there was also the loss of Jacques' friendship No matter how nice he had been about the episode, there was constraint between them now destroying their earlier happy companionship and mutual attraction

She was alone again—more alone than ever before

Whereas normally she would not have bothered a busy woman like the Matron, she paid a call on her before she left the hospital

"For personal reasons, Matron, I'd like to leave London. Also I want to stop working as a daily nurse and live-in somewhere But not here"

Matron stared at the young V A D She'd always had good reports about Mellors and what little she had seen of the V A D made her think of her as one of the steady helpful ones Rushed off her feet though she was, the woman had time to note that Mellors was looking ill, and to be concerned

"Is anything wrong here then, nurse?"

"No, not in the hospital," said Clare, her face reddening, her eyes downcast. "Just for personal reasons I want to get

away from this part of England I'd like to be sent up to some hospital in the North if it's possible"

"Well, I'll have to talk to the Commandant of your Detachment, and we'll see what can be done, nurse," said the Matron

"Thank you," said Clare.

She did not take her usual Underground home She began to walk in the direction of Knightsbridge Her face looked stony She felt almost past caring what happened to her But she felt strongly that she must get away from everybody that she knew From the duty of having to go home and seeing her parents and Gloria Even from Aunt Hilda, who was becoming inquisitive and asking why Clare was behaving so "oddly".

Odd ... *odd.* She loathed that word. She didn't want it in her vocabulary, nor to be made to think that this Thing that made sex so repellent to her was defeating her. Yet never had she felt more defeated than now. There seemed to revolve in her head a circle of men whose passion she had rejected. Robin, Hamilton Craig, Jacques and of course minor episodes headed by Cas Binelli—and Jo. She wanted to forget Mother and Father, her half-sister carrying that illegitimate baby . . . and the hateful memory of the past . . Alf the farm labourer and the girl, Kitty, together under the haystack

Clare found difficulty in getting her key into the latch. She felt as though she were drunk and could not focus She gave a stupid laugh as she stumbled through the hall. Her cousin came out of the bathroom with her hair in pins

"Oh, hullo, darling—I'm just going out—" she began, then changed her tone and stared at Clare "I say, you look as though you've seen a ghost What on earth—"

She got no further Poor Clare began to laugh. Stupid, broken laughter through which she mumbled all kinds of incoherent things Pip could make neither head nor tail of them.

Frightened, she followed Clare into her bedroom.

"Clare—what on earth—" she began again

But Clare had reached her bed and was lying across it now, crying and laughing hysterically, ugly tearing sounds that seemed to be torn from the roots of her being and which terrified Pip.

She left Clare, ran to the telephone and called the doctor who usually attended her mother.

Clare was quite happy and peaceful in the hospital. She supposed they must have been giving her sedatives all the time. She remembered so little of how she came here or how long she was ill.

She felt nothing, and nothing mattered—not Robin or Jacques or Jo—nor her parents, the past, present or future. Just nothing. She lay in a corner of the busy ward, sometimes sleeping, sometimes watching drowsily the activities in the long brightly-painted ward, but always remote, withdrawn, as though in a secret uncaring world of her own.

She wished she could remain in this void for ever. It was wonderful not to mind—not to *feel*. The death of a woman two beds away from her own, screened from sight, left her quite unmoved, the tears of another girl on her right who was always crying, were equally powerless to touch her emotions. She was sorry that anyone should sound so despairing and be so desperate. But sorry with her mind, not with her heart.

She was not, however, allowed to remain in this apathy too long. She supposed one of the nurses must have reported to the doctor that she hardly ate anything. As well as feeling, her appetite, too, had gone.

The woman doctor with the grey hair scraped back into a tight bun sent for Clare. She was taken into the consulting room where the doctor could talk to her privately.

To Clare, the woman sounded serious and concerned, but although she tried to be concerned for herself, Clare had little more than a passing interest in the fact that she had "no actual illness", but that this was a breakdown of her nervous system. Then, gently but firmly, she was told that she must make an effort to pull herself out of the stupor which seemed to her so agreeable.

"It is doing you no good, and you want to get well again, don't you?"

Not particularly, Clare mused, but because she knew it was expected of her she nodded.

"You're a nurse aren't you, Clare? There is therefore a greater call upon your time, energies and health than upon lots of young people today. Your patients need you. Your country needs you. Even if you have no wish to get well for

your own sake, you must try to do so for the sake of other people. Do you understand?"

Clare understood but resented the fact being brought home to her by this doctor.

"Haven't I done enough? It was overwork which caused the breakdown"

The doctor looked at her closely.

"In part, but not in the main, Clare. Your general health record is excellent. You'd be surprised to learn how much the human body is capable of taking in the way of sleepless nights, hard work, bombing and so on. Others have taken more than you and been little the worse for it, physically. It is when the nervous system goes to pieces, one's health goes with it Now tell me, what has happened to make you *want* to 'give in'."

Clare's mouth tightened.

"I never said I wanted to. I didn't ask to come to hospital—I didn't want to be ill. You make it sound as though I deliberately ran away from my duties."

"And isn't that it? Think, Clare! Then come back on Thursday and we'll talk about it again."

Clare didn't want to think about anything—least of all had she wished to be reminded that hospitals were short of nurses and that the staff at the hospital must be suffering from the loss even of her pair of hands.

She returned to bed and began to cry—quietly and for long hours on end. She wasn't really sad but the tears seemed to flow, helplessly It was easier to let them roll down her cheeks than to make an effort to stop them. How silly to be here crying, she often thought, but couldn't stop.

The doctor said·

"This won't do, Clare. You've nothing to cry about. You haven't lost a dear one—like so many women in this war. If you had, I'd be more sympathetic As it is, you are behaving like a spoiled child Now do stop crying please my dear, and tell me about yourself. Tell me about your home, your family, your ordinary life. Have you brothers, or sisters—?"

Strange how the woman kept harping on home, Clare thought, and finally a few answers were dragged out of her. She regretted the impulse which had made her mention Gloria, but the damage was done and after that the doctor

would not leave the subject alone Why should Clare dislike her half-sister? Surely she could understand that what her father had done before he'd married her mother was irrelevant, unimportant? Lots of people had half-brothers or half-sisters—and step-parents. Lots had no relations at all. They were the lonely ones

For the first time, Clare was roused from apathy to anger. "Are they?" she retaliated "You don't really understand, Doctor You don't KNOW how terribly lonely a person can be with parents like mine. *They* belong—they agree about everything—they even agree about Gloria. But I'm different—I'm outside the circle Isolated They think they love me and know what's best for me, but they don't really know me or love me They don't want me to be *myself* They want their idea of a daughter—someone who thinks and acts and feels the way *they* do They believe happiness comes just through happy human relationships"

"And doesn't it?" parried the doctor, gently "Isn't that just what you have said yourself, Clare? That you feel cut off, alone—shut away from others? True happiness comes from giving, and to give, one must love. Surely there is somebody whom you love?"

"I can't love—I can't—I can't . . ." Clare choked and began to cy again

She had thought she hated this grey-haired woman doctor with the shrewd eyes, but gradually she came to look forward to her "talks" and she began to confide in her, and in the telling of her troubles none of them appeared as important as she had imagined They *weren't* important. As the doctor pointed out Clare's inability to fall in love could mean no more than that she had failed to meet the right man. Her very loathing of the mere thought of her relationship with Jo Albiss showed how normal she was She must try for the moment to forget the emotional side of her life and concentrate on her work as a V A D which did matter, make the most of her capacity to enjoy art, good books and music, when there was time There was much to compensate her for loneliness, for her spiritual and emotional struggle and her sense of isolation She was still so young—she would find love

She looked at the woman with sad, bewildered eyes

"How can you know that?"

The doctor smiled

"I know you hate the word, Clare, but I'm convinced Nature will have its way with you. Yes—*Nature* Some day you will meet a man to whom you will want to give everything you have—your time, your protection, your service, your complete mind And when this happens, you will WANT to give him your body, too. I KNOW it will be so. But you won't find him by constantly searching for him in every man you meet. You must give up trying to see in every new friend the qualities that might rouse you to love That will only end in disappointment—because you find nothing. You must wait, Clare, quietly, patiently, until it happens to you. Love will come quite suddenly, and out of the blue, I promise you, but *wait for it.*"

Perhaps she is right, Clare decided Then a strange new peace came over her.

I've tried to force myself to feel—to want to understand what it is my mother thinks so important—my father, too. I must give that up I won't try to grab at life any more. I will wait until love comes to me, just as the doctor says.

Now at last her health began to improve The ability to feel came back, and with it a deep shame that she had ever let her own selfish frustrations and set-backs reduce her to this. She began to *want* to get fit enough to go back to work, to help win the war which she had almost forgotten, stumbling through the jungle of her despair.

She had one more harmonious, refreshing talk with her psychiatrist She was able to smile again. To feel herself—NOW.

She was allowed visitors and was even pleased to see her mother, who, poor dear, she thought arrived looking so terribly anxious and concerned for her

And it's my fault, Clare reproached herselff *She does love me and I've caused her all this worry*

In an effort to repay her she forced herself to inquire about Gloria—to be wholly amiable

"You mustn't feel ashamed of your breakdown, Clare," the doctor—now her good friend—told her when she was finally able to leave the hospital "Sensitive, highly-strung natures like yours are more likely to give way under strain than puddings, the people who are the stodgy, unimaginative ones It isn't your fault—it's your make-up But you must try not to let things get on top of you—ever again. Don't WORRY

and, Claire, if things seem too hard to bear, come and see me. Will you?"

Clare smiled.

"Indeed I will, and thank you. You've done me so much good—I can never tell you how grateful I am."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"WELL, LASS," said Oliver Mellors, "it's good to see you again. I hope you're feeling better."

"Yes, I'm quite well again, thank you Father," said Clare.

It was the last day of June. Not a particularly nice day. Warm, muggy, with a fine drizzle of rain. Last night a thunderstorm had ended a long spell of good weather.

Mr Mellors had brought the car to Brighton station to meet his daughter. Clare appreciated this for she knew how he disliked leaving the farm during the day and having to change out of his old coat and breeches and boots into a suit. But he would not let her come by bus.

"Your mother's busy cooking or she'd have come to meet you with me," added Mr Mellors. "I expect she told you that Mrs Jenkins is laid up with varicose veins and young Marleen does her best but of course she's no good with the cooking."

"How is Gloria?" asked Clare, politely.

"Oh, very well, thanks."

He was relieved when he thought about it, that Clare need not come in contact with Gloria if she did not wish to. Connie had brought the mother and infant to the farmhouse so that she could look after them, but they had moved back to Tiddler's Cottage yesterday.

"And the baby?"

Now Oliver's face took on an expression of pride and pleasure that brought no answering pleasure to Clare. It was, she thought, a rather fatuous look.

"Eh—yes—the baby. He's a bonny boy."

"Let me see," said Clare, "he must be about two months old"

"That's right"

"I'm glad all went well," said Clare in the same polite voice

'T'christening's next week-end. We were hoping you'd stay long enough to attend it,' said Oliver Mellors on a note that had a pleading in it which Clare ignored

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to, Father I'm going up to Long Endon in Derbyshire, to stay with some friends—the Peverels, the day after tomorrow. I'm just taking a couple of days at home with you and Mother before I go."

Oliver raised his brows. He was startled. He knew Long Endon, up near Ockley. He also knew the name Peverel. When he lived up there as Clifford Chatterley's gamekeeper, old Neil Peverel used to shoot over Sir Clifford's grounds. He was curious to hear how Clare had got in with that family but decided not to cross-question her but let her mother find out a few facts. For the next half-hour while they drove over the Dyke and down into Fulking towards Swanningdean, father and daughter had little to say to each other They were both ill at ease.

As always, the man was able to distract his thoughts from human relationships and lose himself in an ecstatic acceptance of the beauties of nature; the rich colouring of earth and sky to which he always felt so close and with which were incorporated his undying passion for his wife.

The great twin hillocks that rose from the green valley known as the Devil's Dyke seemed to him superlatively beautiful seen like this—through a veil of fine summer rain Everything looked very green but with a pearly mist thrown across it, darkened here and there by little clumps of trees One could see for miles from the top of the Dyke right across the Sussex Weald to Chanctonbury Ring. Beyond the hedges, the farm dwellings and the houses looked as though they were little toys set out on a green board by a child's hand

He loved Sussex He had become wedded to it. It appealed to him more than the stark, bleak countryside in which he had spent his boyhood up there in the Midlands. To him, Swanningdean Farm was the finest place in the world and Connie, his wife, the finest of women It was a

tragedy that this daughter they had brought into the world should be so different and so foreign to them

Clare's recent breakdown had worried her father sorely, but it had been worse for Connie. It had upset her to the roots of her being. Oliver had seen it and been powerless to help except to give her all the love and tenderness of which his deep nature was capable—when she asked for it He knew that she had been not only frightened by Clare's illness, but had begun to feel herself responsible for Clare's peculiarities

"We went the wrong way—being so frank and unashamed with her I wish to God we could go back but it's too late," she had said again and again when they first heard that Clare had been taken ill. Hilda, who had never got on with Oliver, had come down to the farm in person and made a scene with them both. It had annoyed Oliver intensely because she only succeeded in upsetting Connie still more But Hilda openly accused them of being responsible for Clare's breakdown

"The doctor says she has a completely wrong outlook on sex and men and that she's a psychological case—thanks to you two," Hilda had said in her blunt, tactless fashion

Clare had been taken to one of the London hospitals reserved for sick nurses and remained there for nearly a month At first she had had a high temperature night and morning and they had tested her for every kind of disease of the body but found that she had none In the long run it had been decided that she was suffering only from a nervous breakdown. Certainly she was at a low ebb physically and had worn herself out recently—but the main trouble was the temporary collapse of her nervous system

She was allowed to see nobody—not even her own mother for the first two weeks Then when Connie was allowed to visit Clare, a very nice woman doctor in charge of the case warned Connie to say absolutely nothing that would be likely to upset the girl Nothing provocative

Oliver Mellors remembered that evening when Connie returned to tell him about the visit to Clare, that she had looked more sad than he had ever seen her. She had told him that she had found Clare perhaps a little more quiet and subdued and painfully thin but with no signs whatsoever of any particular neurosis She had even asked about

Gloria's confinement and really been very sweet—more so than usual

"But it was like sitting beside the bed of a complete stranger It was really awful, Oliver," Connie had said "She thanked me for the flowers and eggs and she was most grateful because I went up to see her but I couldn't reach her. It was like trying to get close to somebody who was behind glass."

Poor Con, thought Mellors, how upset she had been that night He could not console her But the birth of his grandson had been an excitement and even a joy to Connie as well as to him. Strangely enough that anaemic unattractive daughter of his had given birth to a fine little lad who, to Connie's delight, resembled Oliver. The baby had the same eyes and the very fair hair Oliver had had as a boy. The infant was more a Mellors than a Coutts.

Connie had gone up to see Clare once or twice while she was in hospital and each time came back with her naturally bouyant spirits dimmed and the hint of tears in her eyes. But soon Clare began to improve. The doctor said she would make a complete recovery but he did not think she should do any more nursing for another month Connie was waiting now to hear where Clare intended to spend her leave.

Oliver Mellors—of the earth, earthy, having little patience with things like psychiatry and mental states, failed completely to understand his daughter's condition—or what had reduced her to that breakdown. Of course he knew that some women had "nerves" Clare let hers get the better of her. He left it at that and it was probably as good a diagnosis as any. And he felt satisfied when Connie had told him after the last talk with the woman doctor that there was nothing really wrong with Clare. She was a fine, intelligent girl. Everybody who had known her testified to the fact that she was absolutely normal and gay and cheerful in the wards and a first-class nurse

"You've no need to worry, Mrs. Mellors," the doctor had told Connie, "it's just that there are some hidden springs in Clare which are best left untouched, what you might call dangerous trigger-points. Just don't set them off I know she's not happy about her relationships with men so keep off this subject in particular It would of course help greatly if she could meet the right man and get married."

When Connie had repeated this to her husband he had nodded and said in his quiet way

"Ay—the poor lass—that is what I've always thought"

"Oh dear, I wish it would happen," Connie had sighed "And I do wish she didn't harp so on the past Do you know, that doctor asked me who Alf and Kitty were? When Clare was delirious she kept talking about them"

"Who the devil are they?" Mellors had asked

"Well, Alf was that boy who did the pigs and who left to join up; Kitty was the cowman's daughter"

"And why should she recall *them*?"

When Connie had told him—for she had herself certainly remembered that unfortunate episode—Oliver had opened his eyes wide with amazement, shaken his head and stuck his pipe between his teeth again

"I just don't understand that lass It was nature It was nothing for her to be frightened of"

"That," Connie had said in a low voice, "was what I used to think But with all that's happened to Clare now, I *wonder!*"

Clare walked up the familiar flagged path to the farmhouse that she had not seen for over two months, looked at all the charm and loveliness of it and sighed Beautiful—peaceful—all that she should have needed to soothe her But although she was quite well again she was still a little lost in the fog of her own mixed-up emotions

She had really been very ill and she knew it But long sensible talks with the psychiatrist had given her back some of that mental security that she had lost, and restored her balance She felt as though she had been exiled but found her way back to normality, for which she should feel thankful As for sex and men—she didn't think about them at all just at the moment She had built a fresh armour around herself and her emotions Perhaps that wasn't very good But she had built it She was not going to let anything drag her out Not again was she going to start walking down that

"I miss you, nurse," she had said. "I've got what I'd call a congenital idiot in your place Drives me mad You have to tell her everything twice. I must say I never had to tell *you* more than once"

Evans and Clare had been quite good friends before she left

Connie appeared at the door Rather pathetically she had taken pains to put on a nice dress and brushed her luxuriant hair until it shone She had even powdered her face. She came forward with an almost timorous smile It went to Clare's heart She put her arms around her mother and kissed her more affectionately than she had done for years.

"Hello, Mummy," she whispered

That unusual childish name and Clare's kiss threatened to reduce Connie to tears She gave Connie a hug and then turned away quickly

"Wonderful to see you home again, darling," she said

For the next half hour the three of them, eating Connie's good dinner of roast beef and cherry pie, with that rare treat in the war—a jug of cream—appeared to be on the best of terms.

Afterwards, when Clare sat smoking a cigarette and drinking her coffee, Connie, out in the kitchen, said to her husband.

"I begin to feel she's going to be all right"

"Well, don't rush her, Con Go easy," said the wise Mellors

In fact, Clare felt quite relaxed and peaceful as she smoked her cigarette and asked her parents about the "local gossip" The one thing that worried her was the thought of that girl in the cottage over the fields and that infant. Ugh! She hoped she wouldn't have to see it or touch it. Johnnie, they called it Whether that had been the name of the American who had conceived the child, Clare did not inquire But somehow it seemed to her incredible that she should have a half-nephew named Johnnie and that Mother and Father should be grandparents now.

It was not until her father had gone out to work that Clare told her mother where she was going to complete her convalescence.

"My friend Liz Peveral arranged for me to stay at her home—Long Endon It is apparently a lovely place and Sir

Neil and Lady Peverel have sent me a most delightful letter saying they'd be so happy to have me"

"Long Endon!" said Connie, and sat down heavily in the armchair opposite her daughter "But it's only five miles or so from Wragby—my old home"

"Yes, I know," Clare took a cigarette from a fresh packet and lit it She did not look at her mother. Connie said.

"But why up *there?*"

"Why not? I'm very fond of Liz and she's often asked me to go up there It will be a complete change from the south"

"Have you accepted that invitation just out of curiosity? I mean because you knew Liz's home was near Wragby?"

"Partly, yes" Clare admitted.

And now she raised her head and mother and daughter looked into each other's eyes Connie's were still round with amazement and a little frightened.

"Why are you so curious to go up there?" she demanded.

"Because I want to see the man you used to be married to," said Clare, with sudden complete frankness

Silence A large bumblebee sailed majestically through the open casements, buzzed around the room for a moment and sailed out again. Otherwise there was nothing to be heard but Connie's rather heavy breathing and the tick of a grandfather clock at the far end of the room.

Then Connie said

"Well, I can't think why It is most peculiar of you."

She regretted that word as soon as she had said it. Clare spoke now in the old, cold hostile voice

"Peculiar or not, I *want* to meet Sir Clifford," said Clare, shrugging her shoulders "While I'm at Long Endon, Lady Peverel is taking me to Wragby and introducing me to him"

"Don't you think you're being rather disloyal?" said Connie in a low voice

"Why? I thought you were so broadminded and that you wouldn't mind seeing Sir Clifford again yourself"

"I wouldn't mind but I don't particularly want to That's all past history I left Clifford twenty-one years ago My life's with your father now I don't want to remember that I was ever Lady Chatterley"

"Well, ever since I've been a child you told me what a tremendous event Father was in your life while you still *were* Lady Chatterley, and as I have never been able to see

what made you run away with Father, I'm curious to see what the man was like that you ran away from."

Connie shook her head helplessly.

"Oh, Clare—really! You never leave well alone."

Clare stood up, walked to the window and stared out at the garden. The standards were heavy with roses—a lovely sight.

She felt a constriction in her throat—that old, awful sense of loneliness—of being apart from her parents and everybody else

She turned to her mother.

"I don't mean to be disloyal to you and Father. I just want to meet Sir Clifford. I can't tell you why. I don't know myself"

Connie looked back through the years—back to a certain day when Clifford had tried to interest her in heraldry which had been one of his hobbies He loved to trace the ancestry of great people right back to the earliest days He had been talking about some particular family and their crest, and she had said impatiently that she wanted to go out He had lost his temper and flung the book on a table and said.

"Sometimes I think you prefer to use your body rather than your brains."

At the time she had laughed at him, in her mild way. She had never been one to lose her temper But now, remembering him and the temperamental differences between them, she gave a deep sigh and said·

"Oh, well, darling, I think you might get on very well with Clifford In a curious way you're like each other even though there's no relationship."

"Am I?" said Clare.

"Oh yes, my dear—go on up and meet him. I shall be quite interested to hear how you get on I didn't know your friends lived near Wragby I don't think you've ever told me Liz's surname till today Of course I remember the Peverel family, but I'm amazed they have asked you."

"They don't know who I am," said Clare coldly, "so they don't connect the name of Mellors with Father and all the scandal"

"Oh dear," said Connie

"Never mind, Mother. Don't let it worry you. I can tackle

that problem if it ever comes But Liz doesn't realize who you were, so why should her parents find out?"

"But I suppose you intend to let *Sir Clifford* know it?"

"I may do."

"He may very well refuse to see you."

"Somehow I don't think he will"

Silence again. Then Connie asked in low voice:

"Did your friend Liz mention whether Mrs Bolton is still up there—the woman who used to look after Clifford? She must be in her sixties."

"Liz didn't mention her She said Sir Clifford has a manservant who wheels him around"

A strange shiver went through Connie Mellors This conversation had threatened to break like an ugly storm over the peaceful sheltered life down here with Oliver She could almost imagine herself back at Wragby—watching Oliver push Clifford around in his chair—that chair that was too heavy for him Why, *why* did her daughter want to resuscitate the past like this? What strange malicious fascination drew her towards Clifford Chatterley?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"There we are—this is Wragby Hall," said Liz.

Clare sat upright. She felt her cheeks colour Also her heart beat in a curiously quick, uneven fashion She did not really understand why she should be so affected by the sight of her mother's one-time home or at the prospect of meeting Sir Clifford Chatterley

It was a fine July afternoon. The beautiful parkland looked its best—the drive shaded by the tender green lacing of the leaves overhead The grand old trees were, Clare reflected, symbolic of an England untouched by war—unchanged by time They had been here when her mother was a young girl They were still here. They were wise, almost human They knew many secrets—and kept them

They must have known about Mother's love-affair with Father They must have often seen her, youthful, excited, passionate, walking down this very drive on her way to the gamekeeper's hut—to the illicit meetings. It seemed in one way romantic—in another, repellent to Clare.

Liz chattered about many things—oblivious to the serious and rather dramatic thoughts chasing through her friend's head She did not know—nobody did up there—that Clare was the love-child of Constance Chatterley.

Clare realised she was taking a risk—someone in the village might remember the name of Mellors and notice that she resembled her mother But unless ideas like that were put into people's heads, they didn't always see likenesses. She had not yet decided whether or not to tell Sir Clifford who she really was.

So far she had been very impressed with this countryside. It was glorious—wilder than down south—and in places like Wragby or Ockley, unspoiled by the march of time; by the dark sombre houses and tall chimneys which filled the air with black smoke in the industrial area.

She was impressed by Long Endon—the Peverels' home It was an old, dignified stately house surrounded by acres of fine gardens now becoming a wilderness because five of the gardeners had been called up. The two old men left could only keep the flower-garden in front of the house tidy and spend more of their time cultivating the vegetables—for much-needed fresh food.

It was the same here at Wragby. Clare passed long borders sadly full of weeds, uncut lawns, a once magnificent garden reclaimed by Nature Only the one lawn nearest to the house and two rosebeds looked at all cared for It was sad, thought Clare She had heard from her mother that this had been a show-garden of the Midlands.

"I shall introduce you to Sir Clifford, then I'm buzzing off," said Liz

"Oh, must you—" Clare suddenly felt worried.

"Yes, I told you, Darling. I've got to drop this parcel of books at the hospital in Great Endon and do some shopping for Mummy. I'll come and pick you up later I'm sure you'll enjoy talking to Sir Clifford He's so interesting He said on the phone he enjoys talking to the young people—he's so often alone"

"Okay," said Clare briefly

As they got out of the car, Liz smiled at her friend.

"I must say I've never seen you look more attractive But then it's a treat for us to be out of uniform, isn't it? And I adore your get-up"

"Thanks—you look nice yourself, Liz"

Clare returned the compliment with warmth She was grateful to Liz for arranging this holiday So far she had spent three days at Long Endon in absolute comfort Despite the war, the Peverels ate well, there was fresh trout or salmon from one of the rivers every day Lady Peverel had taken a great fancy to Clare and was being charming to her Sir Neil was not only erudite but a delightful host And Liz's brother, Francis, was fascinated by the beautiful red-head and started enthusiastically to paint her Altogether it was proving a real rest and an interesting leave—far removed from the usual routine down at Clare's own home. She felt acutely the difference between the Peverel household and life at Swanningdean Everything at Long Endon was masked by a certain dignified formality which Clare found most refreshing

She had no time to stand and gaze at the fine stone house which seemed to her magnificent The Baronet, himself, suddenly appeared in his electric wheel-chair, moving noiselessly out of the house

"Hello, you two—welcome to Wragby Hall," he said in a genial voice

"Hello, Sir Clifford Jolly nice of you to let me bring my friend to see you," said Liz

Sir Clifford looked at Clare She felt that uneven flutter of her heart again She stood there tongue-tied, staring Sir Clifford was precisely as she had imagined—and as Liz had desribed him An elderly man to one of her years, but still handsome He looked so very English, she thought, so elegant with his beautifully-brushed white hair and square healthy face—strangely unlined considering that he had been so seriously injured in World War One. But although paralysed in both legs, his health had gradually improved He wore a grey flannel coat, white silk shirt and Eton tie A rug covered his wasted legs His eyes—rather cold and blue—stared back at the girl Elizabeth Peverel had brought to Wragby.

"Come indoors. Tea will be ready in a moment," he said.

It was then that Liz excused herself and told him all that she had to do for her mother. Would he mind, she asked, if she left Clare to talk to him Sir Clifford said he was sorry Liz must go but quite understood and added with a polite smile:

"I shall be delighted to have a tête-a-tête with Miss—er . ."

"Please call me Clare."

"Thank you Come along in, Clare."

Then she was sitting on a deep chesterfield in what was obviously a library for it was full of books The tall windows opened on to a beautiful terrace from which one could see for miles across the thickly-wooded countryside

"Nice day for you to see Wragby," said Sir Clifford.

"It's a heavenly place."

"I like it," he said

She gazed around her with interest She loved the books and there were several excellent sporting-prints on pale tobacco-coloured walls. Over the grey stone fireplace hung an oil painting of a small boy on a horse Sir Clifford followed her gaze and smiled briefly, putting on a pair of horn-rimmed glasses as he did so.

"Me, I fear, as a little horror in the good old days when I was able to ride."

"Yes," said Clare and nodded in sympathy with this wounded hero of that other war which had not, as predicted, ended all wars.

After a few moments of conversation with Sir Clifford she changed her opinion of him At first he had seemed a rather suave, self-confident sort of man Later he appeared much more vulnerable and sensitive He had a habit of putting on his glasses and taking them off continually, and a nervous way of hunching his left shoulder She found herself wondering how far he had been affected by the unhappiness of having to divorce her mother.

A man-servant wheeled in a tea-trolley and went out again Sir Clifford nodded at Clare.

"Will you pour out?"

She smiled and drew a chair up closer to his. As she lifted the heavy Georgian silver teapot she wondered whether her mother had used this, too—and how many times she

had lifted it like this, to drink afternoon tea with this man It felt both strange and exciting to be here with him

She found him an excellent conversationalist He seemed to like her, because he kept smiling at her in a kindly way and tried to make her eat all the sandwiches and little home-made cakes which he did not touch He looked delighted when she asked him to tell her about Wragby

"You are interested in old places?"

"Yes, in everything so historic and beautiful"

"What else are you interested in?"

"Art, good music, books, and I've always had a passion for antique furniture—and old silver—like this—" she touched the exquisite teapot, lovingly

He followed, reflectively, the gesture of that slim and lovely hand This was a very beautiful girl, he thought His interest in her was purely aesthetic He admired her fine bones, her long slim figure, her narrow aristocratic ankles. He was entranced by the burnt red-gold of her hair pulled back in that old-fashioned, classic bun He could see she had taste He admired her very simply, well-cut, grey linen dress with its white collar and bolero-coat to match He always liked a well-tailored woman.

Just why his one-time wife, Connie, should have leapt into his mind at this precise moment, he did not really know, except that she had always been one to wear simple tailor-mades and she had once had lovely legs like this child's In fact, in a curious way, Clare's mouth, very white teeth and full white neck were reminiscent of the handsome girl he had married although Connie had been heavier, less graceful, than Clare

He rarely thought of Connie these days The anguish of losing her—the humiliation of knowing she had left him for his uncouth gamekeeper—had almost killed him For months after she had gone, he had refused to set her free and for months after he rescinded that decision and gave her the divorce, he still suffered from an appalling sense of wounded pride. But the years had helped to heal him and for some strange reason extreme mental suffering had done him good He had emerged from the holocaust a new man—as though the phoenix arising from those hideous ashes renewed his courage, his acceptance of human suffering and even his sense of humour He flung himself into the running of his

ancestral home. Mrs. Bolton who had been with him when Connie left had proved a considerable support until her death a year later. Once more he had felt utterly alone. Then he had found a young secretary, David Barrows, who came straight from Oxford University to live at Wragby, help him in his literary research and run the estate for him. David had been a cheerful and capable young man and Clifford had serious thoughts of adopting him as a son and leaving Wragby to him. A third most unhappy blow had been struck by an unkind fate at Clifford. David went into the Air Force as soon as war broke out and was killed in the Battle of Britain Clifford by then found himself inured to suffering and disappointment. He grieved for David but immediately offered Wragby to the Red Cross as a Convalescent Home for Officers, and withdrew to this wing where he kept the library, two bedrooms and a bathroom above, for his personal use

Seeing so many badly-injured young men, he forgot his own miseries and spent many long hours talking to the convalescents, helping with their rehabilitation, and giving generously to those who needed financial support once they were invalided out of the services

Today, Clifford could safely say he had "found himself" He was less bitter and difficult (and he knew it) than he had been after his own war-wound had disabled him for life

He met and talked to many of the girls who were nursing here Despite the fact that their sole interest in life seemed to be men, he got on well with them and in a benevolent, avuncular way, he gave them good counsel. But he had rarely come across any young woman who seemed deeply interested in the things this young friend of the Peverels enjoyed It was a relief to find that Clare was disinterested in frivolities and wanted to hear about heraldry. After the tea had been wheeled away, he sat beside Clare showing her a volume of rare heraldic designs.

As he closed the book he smiled at her.

"I'm sure you smoke and would like one of these."

He held out a silver box.

"No, I won't, thanks," she smiled back.

"Why? Trying to give it up?"

She nodded.

"You've been ill, haven't you? Elizabeth Peverel told me you were on sick leave You weren't seriously ill, I hope."

Clare looked downwards.

"I—I had a nervous breakdown."

Sir Clifford raised his brows

"A girl as young and beautiful ought not to have any serious problems. Was it the bombing, my dear?"

"No," she said in low voice. Then she raised her eyes and stammered: "It was . . . just *me* . . . a pile-up of things that had worried me dreadfully "

"Poor child!" he said gently. And once again was reminded, quite absurdly, of the woman who had been his wife. Connie had had eyes like Clare's—blue and beautiful eyes—long-shaped, long-lashed, like a child's.

Clare felt suddenly that she could not go on accepting this man's kindly hospitality and interest in her until she had told him the whole truth. This had been a wonderful hour for her She could have listened to Sir Clifford's well-modulated voice for ever It was utter bliss to her to sit and converse with a man like this who had so much to teach her—to give to a woman, *mentally* It was such a blessed relief to be able to lose oneself in intellectual discussion. She knew she would never understand how her mother could have wanted to leave Sir Clifford How *could* she have done so? How *could* she have given up this glorious place, deserted this fine man, even for the love of Father?

Clare found herself trembling She opened her lips as though to burst out with her story. But Sir Clifford spoke before she did

"I find it a very great treat to talk to you and realize that there *are* young people today who are interested in my hobbies, and places like Wragby—" he waved an arm around the library— "Youth today strikes me as being very frivolous Frivolity is all very well in its place but it becomes a bore, surely, when it is considered the beginning and ending of daily life "

"I agree, absolutely," said Clare.

"You like to be gay, of course, but that isn't your primary object."

"No, it isn [illegible] never has been "

He [illegible] ft hand.

"You're [illegible]"

"No I was, but I broke it off."

"When you marry," he said with a friendly smile, "you must choose a young man with brains How I wish my young friend, David Barrows were still alive You two would have got on like a house on fire"

"I don't think I shall ever marry!" she broke out, and her cheeks flamed

Now Sir Clifford looked surprised.

"Why not?"

"Oh, that's my problem," she exclaimed with a nervous laugh, and twisted her long fingers in her lap.

Through the open window she could hear the faint sound of music—a record being played on somebody's gramophone, drifting from the lawn which the Convalescent Officers used on the other side of the Hall It made her think of the boys she nursed in the hospital in London It brought back the war and the life which had been confusing and distressing her Here in this old, beautiful library she felt secure, strangely at home She sighed

The man in the wheel-chair, watching her, saw the signs of strain in her beautiful young face He felt troubled for her.

"What is it?" he asked. "Something seems to be on your mind Can I help?"

She was silent a moment, wondering what to reply. Trying to put her at her ease he went on talking:

"Have you parents? Where is your home?"

"My . . . my father has a farm in Sussex"

"I have rather a bad memory for names. I think Elizabeth told me your surname, but I forget it"

"It's Mellors," she said in a small, desperate voice.

Sir Clifford moved the rug a little to one side of his knees, frowned and then suddenly gave Clare a long look.

"I know that name, of course."

Now I've done it, thought Clare. He'll turn me out, and I shall never see him again

"Mellors," repeated Sir Clifford. "I had a gamekeeper called Mellors—twenty—twenty-one years ago—I almost forget how long Time goes so quickly."

She stood up. Her face was quite white but she looked at him fearlessly and said what she had to say.

"He is my father. My mother was . . . was once married to you. Please, please, Sir Clifford, forgive me for having

come here under false pretences I suppose I should have told you at once. It was awful of me. You might not have wanted to—to see me But I wanted so much to meet you My mother has so often spoken of you, and Wragby And when Liz invited me to Long Endon I felt I must see you It wasn't just idle curiosity It was a sort of compulsion, I can't explain But I expect you'd like me to go away, wouldn't you?"

The words poured out in a torrent Now that they were spoken, the colour rushed back into her face. And the man in the wheel-chair sat like a figure of stone with only his eyes alive, round, full of enormous, ludicrous astonishment The silence became unbearable to Clare. She turned.

"I'd better go," she repeated

Then he said:

"Come back Come back here at once"

She obeyed and stood in front of him again His hands were gripping the sides of his chair and he was looking up at her with a painful intensity His thin, rather bluish lips under the white moustache, twitched. Then he said, huskily:

"So you're Connie's child."

She nodded, speechless

"Connie's daughter by that fellow Mellors"

"Yes," said Clare, wincing

Clifford pulled out a handkerchief, coughed, and wiped his moustache and forehead, which was perspiring

"It's damned hot in here," he muttered "Sit down again Sit down, I say" She sat down, her heart hammering. "Connie's daughter," he went on, "it's fantastic . . . unbelievable. Only a few moments ago I was wondering why your eyes and one or two mannerisms you have were familiar to me Now I know. Your mother looked a little like you when I first met her She was a soft-eyed, charming girl, only of different build and without that striking hair. Yet you might be Connie come back You might be. It's completely fantastic!"

"Why did you come here?" he continued "What brought you to my house? No doubt your mother has told you that I'm egotistical, irascible, and useless to any woman . . ." he patted his knees, "a wreck of a man"

"I don't care I like you I like your mind—I could listen to you talk for hours," Clare said in a violent tone.

"Your mother used to listen to me talk and I used to try and teach her. But she never had your capacity for learning."

"She's never been keen on learning. She isn't interested in books," said Clare.

"No, she never was. She liked gay company and dinner-parties and so on. Later—she changed completely. But we won't go into that! Strange that Mellors' child should want to see *me*."

She blushed.

"I ought to have known that I wouldn't be welcome here. It was tactless of me to come."

Clifford Chatterley stared at this young ghost of his lost Connie, experienced a lifetime of emotion within a few minutes. These emotions were warring with each other and seemed to split his very personality in half. On one hand he was the injured, embittered husband who loathed the memory of the tall, thin, stooping gamekeeper with his soft dialect and his aloofness and that queer dignity which had marked him out from his fellow men. He had loathed Oliver Mellors. The name had never been mentioned in this house since the day his solicitor came down to tell him that the Decree was made Absolute.

On the other hand, he was a man older by eighteen years. And a second terrible war was wiping out so many personal grievances. Personal disasters were dwarfed by events. And he had grown tolerant. Oliver Mellors remained in some dim recess of Clifford's memory as the thief who had incredibly filched from him his wife and disgraced the honourable name of Chatterley—too contemptible to rouse his anger ever after. Connie, he pitied. He had been certain she would live to regret her mad action. And he missed her companionship, despite what she had done to him.

Now, here with him sat a lovely young girl who was Connie's flesh and blood. There moved within Clifford the uneasy recollection of the day when he and Connie had discussed his impotence and the tragedy of his inability to produce an heir for Wragby Hall. One day he had told her, perhaps too recklessly, that if she ever had a child by one of her lovers he would accept it and make it his heir.

But then, of course, he had thought she would go into the arms of a man of her own class. It had been the most

appalling shock to him to realise that she had chosen for a lover a low, common fellow.

But there were no signs of "commonness" about *Clare.* She looked more of a thoroughbred than her mother. Now, when she raised her eyes to him, he saw that they were beseeching and a little frightened. He made haste to comfort her.

"Don't look like that. I haven't the slightest intention of turning you out just because you are *who* you are."

The relief in those big, beautiful eyes was flattering to the elderly invalid. He found his own good spirits returning. He could even smile.

"Take a cigarette," he said, "and calm down. You've told me the truth. Now we're on level ground. My interest in you as a person hasn't ceased. But I would like to ask you a few questions."

"If there's anything I can answer . . ."

"How is your mother?"

"Very well. She keeps remarkably fit."

He looked away from Clare and out through the open windows at a squirrel darting across the sunlit lawn. He said:

"Connie was always fit and full of high spirits. Now that I have had so much time to think about it I can see that it must have been very hard on her to be married to a useless fellow like myself."

"But you're not!" the girl broke out indignantly. "You aren't useless. Brains are more important than bodies. That's the bone of contention between my parents and myself. They think the physical side is all-important. I don't. You have everything—*everything* to offer a woman."

"Thank you." Sir Clifford bowed his head with old-world courtesy.

"I mean it," she cried.

"I'm sure you do. But then you happen to be on a higher plane intellectually than your mother ever was. She had a mild interest in art—studied it as a girl—but you're different. You have an excellent brain and you're the most receptive child I've ever talked to. Anything I ever told Connie, she used to forget. I feel you will remember all you've learned today. Tell me more about *her*. What's she like now?"

Clare described her mother, adding generously that despite her plumpness, Connie was still beautiful.

Then Clifford forced himself to ask the one question that rolled rather bitterly around his tongue.

"Is she happy? Has this extraordinary marriage of hers worked out?"

"Yes If it doesn't hurt you too much to hear this."

"I'm beyond being hurt, my dear child," he said not quite truthfully. "Tell me "

"She is so happy with my father that she has no real time for anything or anybody else. They've both been very good parents and kind and generous to me But I've always felt the 'odd man out' They didn't really need me "

So, thought Clifford, *my dear Connie—how very strange! That gamekeeper, that ill-bred, soft-spoken, lanky chap, who used the sort of language you see written on walls in public conveniences, has pleasured you so greatly that he has kept you happy for twenty years. But I failed—completely*

Clare continued with her story of her parents and her home Her innate sense of loyalty to them forbade that she should express openly the regret she had been feeling ever since she came here, that she was not *his* daughter. She drew a pleasant picture of her father.

He was devoted to her mother . . . always busy on the farm . rarely used a gun except to keep vermin away He could handle any animal in a miraculous way . . he had gentle, wonderful hands, until suddenly Clifford's voice broke across hers:

"Wasn't there another child? Of his first marriage? I seem to recollect there was."

Clare blushed again She could not bring herself to describe Gloria She said briefly:

"Yes She . the girl, didn't turn out very well "

"And you," said Sir Clifford, "joined the Red Cross And live with your Aunt Hilda. Can't say I ever cared for Hilda."

"Well I get on with her very well," said Clare, defensively.

The man in the wheel-chair became conscious of fatigue and a sudden violent pain in the back of his head, which often attacked him after a tiring day. This meeting with Connie's child had upset him more than he had at first realized

Abruptly he said:

"Will you forgive me if I ring for my man? I think I must leave you now and rest"

She stood up, depressed again

"Thank you for seeing me and being so kind I can't tell you how much it has meant to me. I wish the past could have been otherwise—that we could have met again"

His eyes suddenly twinkled at her. He held out his hand and she placed hers in it hesitatingly. The clasp of his was reassuring even though his was the dry, cold hand of an elderly man.

He said·

"Dear me! What an impulsive creature you are! Up in an instant like a rocket. Woof! But I like your spirit and I like your outlook I don't quite know how you came to be the progeny of those two but things seem to have turned out very well for them and I only hope you will be equally happy one day."

She made no answer but drew her hand away, her eyes downcast.

"I like your loyalty to your parents but you haven't convinced me that you are happy"

"But that is my own fault. I'm so—difficult I don't seem able to take life calmly and dispassionately like most people"

"Worthwhile people are usually highly-strung I think I understand you Anyhow, this certainly isn't going to be good-bye And I want you to feel that you will be welcome at Wragby any time you care to come"

The way she flushed up now, and the sparkle in her eyes enchanted him He felt extraordinarily drawn to her He felt gentle and tender, and without his usual desire to be sarcastic

"Come back and see me, Clare," he said "I'm a lonely man in my way, and I have a feeling you're lonely too. Let's talk some more together"

"Oh, I'd love to—honestly, Sir Clifford," she exclaimed.

"Good. How about tomorrow?"

"Yes Please say what time."

"This time is good for me Come to tea again"

"Yes," she said. "I'm supposed to be sitting for Francis Peverel, who is painting my portrait, but I'll put it off"

Connie's daughter wanting so much to come and see me,

reflected Clifford with wonder. Connie's daughter, who should have been mine . . . Ah! that was a painful thought!

Clare walked to the library door He said:

"If Elizabeth hasn't called for you, just walk around the grounds—take a look at them and at the rest of the house."

"Thank you, I will."

"Shall you tell your . . . your mother that you and I have become friends?" he asked.

She turned to him with the proud fearless look that he admired.

"Yes, I will."

"Do the Peverels know?"

"No!"

"Then I should keep it under your hat. No need to start off a buzz of curiosity"

"I won't tell anyone."

"Good-bye, Clare And, child . . . I'm glad you came here," he said softly.

She went out of Wragby Hall with those words ringing in her ears and a strange new sense of people flowing through her very being It was as though with this elderly paralysed man who had once been her mother's husband, she had found a deep bond . . . a more spiritual and intelligent understanding . . . than she had received from any of the younger men.

She wondered what Mother would say . . .

Waiting for Liz, Clare strolled round the garden and tried to analyse her feelings It did not seem to make sense to her that she should mind so much whether she saw Sir Clifford and Wragby again She had felt an almost desperate anxiety while she had waited to see his reactions to her admission that she was Oliver Mellors' child. It had been such a relief when he had said that he wanted to go on seeing her again, and said it as though he meant it

Was it just curiosity which had brought her here? She wondered If so, it had never been a casual curiosity but a frantic search for something in the past which would help her adapt herself to the present; perhaps even help her to go forward more happily to meet the future

She had no wish to be disloyal to her parents, but she had to admit she found Sir Clifford a fascinating character. His concise brain—his interest in learning—in all the things

of the mind, had given her an exact answer to her desire to ignore the physical and live on a more intelligent plane.

She admired Wragby even more than Long Endon. Wragby was vast, yet finely proportioned, and the big rooms were full of antiques; of that rich, awe-inspiring atmosphere only to be felt in buildings of historic interest. Clare had been fascinated by all she saw. She felt uplifted by the grandeur of Wragby; the magnificent minstrel's gallery hung with the portraits of Chatterleys of the past. Proud, aristocratic gentlemen of the Elizabethan or Stuart period with their ruffs round their necks and their narrow strong hands upon the hilts of their swords; the ladies wearing court dress, low corsages showing their high bosoms, some beautiful, some not, but all with the round, penetrating Chatterley eye. One painting of a gentleman of the Court of Queen Anne bore a definite likeness to Sir Clifford.

It fascinated her to see and realize what ancestry meant and what it must mean to Sir Clifford, how terrible it must have been for him to be robbed of the capacity to father a son and heir Yet he was not alone in every sense of the word. He could live in the past among this friendly crowd of ancestors. One must feel here, she decided, like a cog in a splendid wheel that moved endlessly through the ages—just one among many, insignificant amidst so much greatness. One could lose oneself in the thrill of the Chatterley treasures. She had caught a glimpse of the massive silver, still to be seen in the big dining-room War or no war, Sir Clifford would not have it put away Bound by the golden cord of pure English tradition, he would not depart from its demands upon his time or his pocket, and continued to preserve it

She could understand why he was never bored here—why he had wanted her to take a look at all that delicate, valuable china kept behind glass in old corner cupboards. She had never seen a home quite like this before but she could understand the effect it must have on the person who belonged to such a place. Nothing could take this heritage from Sir Clifford When her mother left him, even *she* had not been able to take *this* More than ever it pin-pointed for Clare the real reason for the feeling she always had that things were too concentrated, too small and insignificant in a place like Swanningdean There, her mother and father lived

in the snug farmhouse more or less in each other's arms, oblivious to anything that went on around them, not caring particularly what had been done in the past and what might happen in the future. Only the present mattered to them, within the narrow confines of their egotistical passion. But Wragby exalted Clare. Life was painted on such a broad canvas and in such glowing colours, it produced in her a feeling of deep respect—a sense of joy that was selfless because it belonged to others beside herself.

It was *this* that had made her dread rejection at Sir Clifford's hands and why she so passionately wanted to go on seeing him, hearing about life through his eyes, drawing from his store of knowledge. At Wragby she found the strength, the vision and above all the restraint which appealed to everything fundamental in her. The fact that Sir Clifford, after his first courteous inquiry as to whether she was engaged or not, afterwards never once mentioned her private life, had not been lost upon her. More deeply than ever she could see what a hopeless gulf yawned between her mother and herself Her mother had once said.

"Can't you see, Clare, that this restraint you're always talking about is the very thing which binds you to sex? It is the surrender to it that *releases you.*"

Here, at Wragby, she could feel her own views vindicated. Passion played no part in Sir Clifford's life and yet his mind was free to roam at will over every aspect of living—enriched by past generations, by beauty, art, and an intellect far beyond her own

What physical delight could compare with this exaltation of the mind. Her mother lived on a different plane and obviously did *not* have the capacity to rise to Olympian heights. This explained her willingness to leave Sir Clifford and Wragby and run away with Father Clare felt for the first time in her life that she understood her mother She could not know that Connie's one desire had been to show her daughter that aesthetic pleasures could never bring complete fulfilment to a woman, nature did not fashion a woman's body for procreation, nor endow her with the desire to love and be loved, to no purpose No matter how Clare might try to run away from this basic truth, she would realize it in the end and just as she, Connie, had discovered it nearly too late.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"I CAN'T PAINT in this light and now you tell me you're not going to sit for me tomorrow. It's very disappointing!" said Francis Peverel

"Won't the morning do?" asked Clare.

"No, I've promised to take my mother into Derby"

"And now I come to think of it," said Clare, "Liz and I are going to have a picnic lunch in Sherwood Forest"

"I'll never finish this painting before you leave," he grumbled, wiping his brushes and putting them back in a jar of turpentine

Clare had been sitting for Liz's brother in his studio which had been specially made for him out of one of the attic rooms at Long Endon It had a north light but it was not so good at this late hour He had made her come up and sit for him when she returned from Wragby. He never seemed tired of looking at her and trying to reproduce her vivid colouring.

She got up from the high-backed chair in which she had been posing and gazed down through one of the dormer-windows at the garden She could see Liz exercising two graceful greyhounds which belonged to her mother. She loved this place, but it had not the same attraction for her as Wragby The grounds were very formal There were a lot of clipped yews and little pathways and statues in the Italian style which Lady Peverel fancied.

Some of the furniture was ornate. There was a good deal of marble, painted and gilded wood, wrought iron and rich draperies—everything immensely beautiful and glamorous But Wragby had stirred Clare to the depth of her soul Its Spartan English simplicity was far more in keeping with her own temperament

Turning, she saw Liz's brother staring at her disconsolately.

He was a tall, thin boy—not at all like Liz who resembled her father Francis had inherited his great-grandmother's nose and darkness of hair and eyes. Physically he was too pale and delicate-looking to attract Clare, although he had great sweetness and she pitied him because of his ill-health She knew that it was a constant sore with him that he had not been passed fit for active service. As usual when he was painting he wore old grey flannels and a sports shirt. He had beautiful well-bred hands. She liked his paintings and had seen most of the many canvases stacked round the room He wanted to become a portrait painter—possibly he would turn to it once the war was over. At present there was not much future for an artist.

She enjoyed a quiet hour sitting up in the studio listening to him talk while he painted. Sometimes he put on records—background music, which he said inspired him They had many vivid discussions on art and music.

She knew that Francis was in love with her

"He's always had a passion for red hair and you've got such a wonderful figure and such a lovely skin, too—he's completely bewitched," Liz had said only last night.

She had then hinted that if Clare would only stay here for the rest of her leave and continue to see a lot of Francis, he would probably ask her to marry him In impulsive, naive fashion, Liz added:

"And I wish it *could* be! Mummy thinks you're marvellous, too. And Daddy thinks you're the most attractive friend I've ever brought to Long Endon It would be heavenly if you became my sister-in-law"

Clare looked distressed "There's no question of any such thing, Liz I've only been here a week and Francis and I hardly know each other"

"All the same, there's such a thing as love at first sight, and Francis is absolutely at your feet"

Clare knew that if she wanted she could become Lady Peverel and Long Endon would be her home She could live up here, like Mother had done twenty years ago. Yet the thought gave her no pleasure

"What are you thinking of?" Francis asked.

"Lots of things"

He turned from her to the canvas on the easel, then looked back at her.

"I can't quite catch the wonderful light in your hair. I feel like slashing the damned canvas You're so beautiful, Clare, you ought to be immortalized by a really important painter"

"I'm perfectly happy to be painted by you," she said, smiling.

"I don't think you know how lovely you are."

"Of course I don't!" she laughed

He looked at her with dark, hungry eyes.

"I wish I could make you understand what you do to me," he said in a low voice

"Oh, Francis!" she protested, embarrassed.

He persisted

"You're Rossetti's Beatrice, pale and proud with your long neck and that fullness in your white throat and the hollows in your cheeks You have wonderful high cheekbones You're a lily-girl"

That woke uncomfortable memories in her.

"A Frenchman I knew once called me that," she said, frowning

"I hoped I was the first to think of it," said Francis, childishly disappointed.

She sighed Her mind was not really with Francis. She liked him tremendously and enjoyed his companionship, his artistic vein appealed to her But she could not love him passionately. She knew it Suddenly she said.

"Let's go down and join Liz It's so lovely in the garden. Nobody would know there's a war on"

He made a movement towards her but stopped midway. He was too full of sensibility to dream of saying or doing anything too quickly and frightening her away, and he could see that she was not ready for a proposal from him

As they walked down the wide staircase, he talked to her on a casual note

"How did you get on with old Sir Cliff?"

"I liked him enormously I could listen to him talking for ever"

Francis laughed.

"M'm! He seems to have impressed you."

But he could not understand why she should want to go and sit beside that dry, elderly, paralysed man. True,

Francis' own father enjoyed a chat with Clifford Chatterley but Francis would have thought Clare would be bored

As they reached the garden door, he said:

"I expect Liz has told you about the Chatterley scandal which took place when Mother and Father were first married?"

"Yes"

"I've often thought I'd like to meet the famous Lady Chatterley. Must have been quite a woman! Do you know that she ran off with a *gamekeeper*?"

A burning blush spread over Clare's face. She kept it averted from the boy.

I don't think I'd better stay on with the Peverel's, she thought. It's no good Francis getting too fond of me. Besides, if his people found out who *I* am, they mightn't want me here.

An aged butler who had served Sir Neil's father before him came into the hall with a telegram on a silver salver and held it out to Clare

"For you, Miss Mellors."

"Oh, lord!" muttered Francis. "I loathe telegrams. I'll be livid if this is recalling you to London or something."

Clare read the wire It wasn't recalling her, but it struck an ominous note and caused her considerable anxiety.

> Something terrible happened. Need your help. Will be phoning you tonight seven o'clock please try to be in.
>
> Evelyn Talbot

"It isn't bad news, I hope?" Francis said anxiously.

"Well, I don't know exactly, but it may be," said Clare slowly, and folded the telegram. Then she added: "Would you mind, Francis, if I don't go with you down to the Cricket Inn for that drink this eveing?"

He was disappointed and said so.

"I don't seem in luck today."

"I'm sorry," she said, "but a great friend is ringing me at seven and I must be here to take the call. She says she needs my help."

"I'm sorry, too," said Francis gently.

As it neared seven o'clock, Clare sat in the morning-room where Lady Peverel had said she could take Evelyn's call

undisturbed Her mind seethed with all kinds of conjectures. What "terrible" thing could have happened to Evelyn? Was it possible that Colin was dead? Had he been killed? She had heard last week from Evelyn that he had been with the Tank Corps in the recent attack on Pantelleria. She thought she couldn't bear it for Evelyn if Colin had been taken from her. They were such a happy pair and Clare remembered Colin, of all men she had met in this war, as being one of the finest and best.

She was extremely worried by the time her call came through, half an hour late. It was half past seven when she lifted the receiver and heard Evelyn's rather high-pitched, youthful voice Fortunately it was a clear line, although the operator had just said the call was being made from Lerwick, in the Shetlands

"Hello, Evelyn, how are you–" began Clare.

But it seemed that Evelyn had no time for preliminaries. *What she had to say must be said quickly and concisely It* was bad but less serious than Clare had been imagining.

Colin was not dead but wounded and back in England, and in a hospital in Brighton.

"I'm worried to death," said Evelyn, "Clare–can you hear?"

"Yes, perfectly."

Evelyn poured out her story. A week ago she had been told that her husband had been wounded for the second time and flown home for emergency treatment. The next thing she heard was that he was in a hospital in Brighton which specialized in the treatment of bad burns and facial injuries. Like the one in East Grinstead, it was a Centre for Plastic Surgery and was under the direction of two of the great plastic surgeons of the day.

Evelyn got leave and went down to Brighton. She found what she described to Clare as a mere "mummy". Colin's face and head were wrapped in bandages with only slits for nose and mouth He was heavily drugged and unconscious.

Clare, shocked and distressed, comforted Evelyn as best she could from so far away and asked for further information which Evelyn seemed unable to give. The doctors and Colin's nurses were all "cagey". Nobody would offer a definite prognosis

This had made Evelyn even more apprehensive. She knew

nothing but the fact that her husband had received grave facial injuries.

"The doctors tried to cheer me up and told me not to worry But how can I help it—I'm worried to death. If only I knew what was wrong—how long before he'll get better—*if* he'll get better. Oh, Clare, you must help me It would be different if *you* asked them—you're a nurse, so I don't suppose they'd keep you in the dark. You must go down and see Colin and find out for me You *must.*"

"I don't suppose they'll let me see him—" began Clare, but Evelyn would not accept this. She sounded almost hysterical. She kept saying that she loved Colin so much—she couldn't bear anything to be permanently wrong with him. She couldn't bear him to suffer.

Remembering that Evelyn had never come into contact with any of the horrors of war injuries, Clare could understand her present hysteria. It must have shaken her terribly to see Colin in such a condition.

Apparently Evelyn had stayed near the hospital for forty-eight hours, then returned to her job in the Shetlands when they had told her there was nothing she could do.

"I know it's worse than they've told me!" Evelyn kept sobbing, and nothing Clare could say consoled her.

Feeling deeply concerned for Evelyn, and still more so for Colin, Clare promised to visit him and report to Evelyn without delay, even if it meant cutting short her sick leave.

"Oh, thank you, Clare darling. I knew you'd help!" exclaimed Evelyn, and rang off.

For a few moments Clare considered the facts uneasily. Would it be any use her going down to Brighton? Would they let her see Colin or tell her more than they had told his wife, just because she, Clare, was a V.A D.?

Perhaps it was not so serious—she must telephone the hospital at once and find out if there were a chance of seeing Colin.

Matron herself spoke to Clare Nobody, she said was allowed to see Captain Talbot who was seriously ill but not on the danger list The injuries were mostly to the face. He wouldn't be having visitors for at least another week If Clare would like to telephone again in a few days time, she could perhaps be given further details of Captain Talbot's progress.

"I shall be coming down to Sussex before I return to my hospital, Matron. If I may, I'll call in and see how things are," she said

This somewhat unsatisfactory conversation over, Clare could do nothing but send a telegram to inform Evelyn that Colin was in no immediate danger but was allowed no visitors for a further week; that she, Clare, would go and see him immediately the ban was lifted and then report to Evelyn again

Clare felt a deep unease for the rest of the evening Colin and Evelyn were such wonderful people—and so much in love It seemed even more tragic because it had broken the idyll of perfection She was reminded sharply of the war and the work that had to be done It was time she went back. She had no right to be here enjoying herself She felt very remorseful but knew that she would not be allowed to return to duty until her leave ended. Since she must stay up here, she would try to improve her mind She looked forward to more of those soothing and interesting talks with Sir Clifford They would at least keep her occupied until she could go back to work.

She agreed to sit for Francis again very early the next morning before going out with Liz After an hour of painting, Francis suddenly threw down his brushes, came to her side and said abruptly:

"I'm terribly in love with you I want to marry you, Clare I know you don't love me as I love you, but couldn't it ever happen, Clare? I'd wait for as long as you wanted."

As gently as possible, she replied:

"I like you very much. I want us to go on being friends, but I just don't want to marry you or anybody. I'm sorry, Francis."

He looked miserable.

"I guessed that you've had some unhappiness in love," he said, "but surely you don't mean to stay single all your life? To waste all your beauty and sweetness would be a crime."

"Marriage isn't the only answer for a woman. There are other things in life."

"Such as—?"

"I can't explain, but I know there *are* other things, and I know that I don't want to get married"

"That can only be because you don't love me."

"I am very fond of you," she said unhappily.

He took both her hands and kissed them.

"Forgive me for embarrassing you. I don't know why I should expect you to love me, anyhow. Pretty conceited of me."

She made no answer but shook her head in soundless denial of this. He showed up at his best now. He put his own desires aside and told her that if she wanted him as a friend, she should have him, now and always.

"We all love you at Long Endon. Don't let me drive you away, sweet, lovely Clare."

"It's you who are sweet," she said, fighting her inclination to cry. She hated to hurt him. He made an effort to change the conversation and begged her to sit for him again while he went on with the portrait.

She reflected sadly that she could never love or belong to Francis Peverel, but she was grateful that he still offered her his friendship. She did not want to make an abrupt exit from Long Endon. She wanted this second week here where she was fast regaining her balance and peace of mind, and could go on visiting Wragby.

The post, which came late at Long Endon, brought her a letter from her mother—one of Connie's rather rambling, gossipy letters. Because in its way it was so childish, it made Clare feel affectionately towards her. There was something very simple about Mother. She expressed delight that Clare's last letter had spoken of her improvement in health and spirits and said that she was longing to hear Clare's impressions of Wragby and Clifford.

> Your father and I have a request to make of you. We don't often ask you to do something that you may not want to do but you know how deeply we feel about the gamekeeper's hut across the park. Would you just go and take a peep at it and tell me what it looks like. I planted a *montana rubra clematis* on the right of the door because I thought it would eventually spread right over the hut. I always loved those little pink, starry flowers—they come out in such profusion. Tell me how high it has grown . . .

The rest of the letter gave some local news and added

that Gloria was neither looking nor feeling particularly happy and seemed to find life at Tiddler's Cottage far too quiet She did not seem able to devote herself to the little baby. He was far more often with Connie.

She kept calling Johnnie "the little baby" which Claire found rather touching

On her way to tea with Sir Clifford that afternoon she made a detour and tried to find the gamekeeper's hut. It somewhat offended her susceptibilities to have to look at it, but as Mother seemed so anxious that she should send a report, Claire had not the heart to refuse

She could find no trace of the place and eventually waylaid one of the old gardeners, and asked him casually if he could direct her there

The old man looked at her with surprise.

"The gamekeeper's hut!" he said, pulling his ear and wiping the back of a horny hand across a wet forehead, "I recollect it 'Twere a prutty little place but Sir Clifford had it pulled down after my Lady left"

Claire blushed She could understand very well why Sir Clifford had had the place pulled down She muttered her thanks and moved away, conscious that the old gardener must be looking after her with bewilderment, wondering why she should have been interested

She could quite well understand how a jealous, enraged husband had loathed the very thought of that hut. The idea stuck in her mind for the rest of the afternoon, although she made no mention of her inquiries to Sir Clifford.

Later that evening, on her return to Long Endon, she wrote and told her mother the facts.

She also gave a long description of her meetings with Sir Clifford.

> I really was surprised that he wanted to see me again once he knew my identity, but he made me very welcome this afternoon I think he must have a nice nature because he actually remembered my saying that I love home-made scones and butter, because he had made his cook produce some specially for me He kept looking at me with a benign sort of smile He isn't at all sentimental—except about Wragby Most of his remarks are laced with a certain dry, ironic wit. It is such a rare

treat to listen to him talk We got on the subject of English architecture today and he showed me one or two valuable books with magnificent plates of some of the historic houses of England There is little he does not know about the fine points of such buildings and I have only to name a county and he can tell me what house should be seen there.

Clare went on to describe some of the fascinating pictures of beautiful fireplaces she had shown her and expressed surprise how in a few short hours he had improved her knowledge of so many things.

He unlocked a chest and produced his valuable collection of miniatures which, he said, used to fascinate you, Mother—*Clare wrote on in her neat script*—He pulled out one exquisite miniature of the Princesse de Lambelle which had been smuggled over with one of the French aristocrats during the Revolution and deposited at Wragby where the refugee had stayed during the reign of the Prince Regent, and said it was your favourite Do you remember it? You will see from all this that now and again he talks in quite a normal, friendly way about you.

What Clare did not press home in either that letter or any subsequent ones which she wrote to her mother from Long Endon, was the comparison she continually drew between Wragby and Swanningdean Swanningdean suffered rather too badly—not because she put any snobbish value on the historic home of the Chatterleys, but because of its tremendous dignity She felt so completely relaxed in that atmosphere

If she enjoyed the time spent with Sir Clifford, he left her in no doubt that he, too, derived equal enjoyment. On one occasion, she and Liz were invited to lunch. On the way home, Liz said:

"My word, Clare, you do seem to have drawn the old boy out I've never seen him so expansive"

They had been sent back to Long Endon with a basket of the nectarines which grew plentifully against the south walls of Wragby.

The Peverels teased Clare about the capture of the elderly irascible baronet Clare blushed when they did so but was pleased

Now the days passed much too quickly Each day, Clare seemed to stay longer at Wragby On the last night but one before she returned south, Sir Clifford invited her to dine with him and afterwards to attend a film show which was being put on for the patients in the Convalescent Home.

The film was an old favourite—Laurence Olivier's Henry V—the only sort of film to appeal to Sir Clifford. It appealed equally to Clare She had been much younger when she first saw it but she enjoyed it more now and gave a little exclamation of pleasure when they reached that particular point in the film when the archers in a long line let loose the arrows from their upraised bows It was flawless artistry. Superb!

Clifford from his wheel-chair smiled as he heard Clare's little cry and in the dimness saw the rapt expression on the young girl's face

How sensitive she was to art and to all things beautiful and how greatly he had grown to look forward to her visits, and to dread the day when she must go back south He might never see her again

Somehow he never connected Clare with Oliver Mellors. She was just Connie's daughter, and the child who should by rights have been his She had brought him great joy in a fashion which he found hard to explain to himself But he told her so when the moment came for them to bid each other good-bye

"I feel there is a real bond between us, my dear, despite the great difference in our ages and the fact that my life is nearly over and yours just beginning"

"I shall never forget you or Wragby, Sir Clifford," Clare replied, touched

"And you will come back? You will visit Wragby again? I'd like to feel you will look on it as your second home There is always a room for you here My housekeeper will look after you Please come and stay with us one day instead of at Long Endon"

"That's one of the nicest invitations I've ever had!" exclaimed Clare, genuinely delighted

He sighed as he looked up into the flushed young face

Connie, Connie, he thought *Why did you ever leave? This girl of yours has brought back so many memories. But I wouldn't have it otherwise.*

"I'll write to you, Sir Clifford," said Clare, with all the fervour of youth.

"It would be nice," he said, "I shall look forward to your letters And Clare—"

"Yes?" she asked

"I've been thinking quite a bit about you. We've got to know one another pretty well even in so short a time. I want to say this to you Your mother wasn't altogether wrong, you know—about the need of men and women for love. Few people can live altogether on an intellectual plane There can be no survival for life without the attraction of male for female and vice versa. Understand what I'm getting at? Maybe I've only learnt it through great bitterness and sorrow, and you're the only person in the world I've ever said such a thing to But I feel that you're going a little off the beaten track, the track that will bring happiness to a young, beautiful girl like yourself. Understand?"

She stood silent a moment, reflecting. Then she said in a low voice

"What you're trying to tell me is that I ought to get married."

"One day, yes. Wait for the right man by all means—but don't put the possibility of marriage right out of your life. It would be wrong for you to bury yourself in the past as I have done. Life has to be lived and not just chronicled, Clare."

Clare was deeply shaken Here was Sir Clifford, of all people, advocating her mother's way of life—just when she had made up her mind because of him and Wragby that the intellect was all that mattered. He shook her hand and gave her a smile

"You'll find out one day, Clare Be a good girl. Don't work too hard And don't get ill again. And when you do meet the right man, bring him to see me, will you?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CLARE RETURNED to London on the Saturday—a rather hot, sticky day when London offered no attraction. She felt stifled after the fresh brisk air at Long Endon

She left her suitcase at the flat Aunt Hilda and Pip were both out of Town Clare decided to go straight home The last letter she had received from her mother had hinted that all was not well with Gloria She had sounded concerned about the girl's future. Dutifully, Clare made up her mind to offer what help or advice she could.

She did not let her parents know she was coming and it was a pleasant surprise to Connie when she heard that familiar voice calling

"Hello, are you there, Mother?"

Connie was in the kitchen making a bacon and cheese pie for her husband's supper It was one of his favourite dishes She greeted Clare with enthusiasm

"How sweet of you to come, darling Lovely surprise! When did you get back?"

"Midday I caught an early train and had a sandwich at the station."

Connie kissed her daughter on both cheeks then stepped back and smiled at her approvingly.

"My word, I've never seen you look so well."

"I feel fine—quite myself again"

Clare said the words with confidence and her mother knew that whatever had caused that terrible breakdown, Clare had overcome it She looked sunburned. Her hollowed cheeks had filled out a little She was more beautiful than ever Connie's heart swelled with pride and relief She had been afraid of what that holiday at Long Endon (so close to Wragby) might have done to Clare; whether it might even have turned the girl against her But as far as Connie could see, it had done nothing but good Clare was affectionate and obviously more tranquil than she had been for a long time If she still had her inner worries, they were no longer apparent.

"I'll make a cup of tea and you must tell me all about Wragby," said Connie.

"Where's Father?"

"On the farm—" began Connie, but Clare interrupted:

"No, he's just coming in now." She saw her father's lean frame in the doorway. She went towards him and offered her cheek for a kiss.

"Hello Lovely to see you again, Father."

Oliver Mellors had no time to be surprised at this unusual demonstration, nor to notice how much better Clare was looking. He obviously had something on his mind. He returned Clare's kiss but glanced at Connie as he said:

"Gloria's done a bunk"

"Done a bunk!" repeated Connie, eyes and mouth round with astonishment

"Yes," he said. "Frankie, Mrs. Potter's kiddie, came down to the milking shed and gave me this note It appears that our Gloria handed it to him and told him to be sure I got it as she was off to catch the bus and wouldn't be back"

"I didn't meet her when I came down the main road. She must have walked across the fields to the bus stop," said Clare.

"It's a pretty kettle of fish," muttered Mellors.

He handed Connie the note, pulled a tobacco pouch out of his pocket and began to fill his pipe

Mother and daughter read the almost undecipherable words scrawled on a page torn out of a laundry book.

> Dear Dad. I'm sorry if this is a shock but I cant stand it down here any longer—country life's too quiet for me and I can't seem to settle—not even for the kid's sake. I'm leaving him behind becos I can't get a job with a baby to mind and you've both been so decent about him I know he's better off with you If it wasn't for me you could probably let Tiddler's Cottage and the rent could pay towards Johnnie's keep
>
> Don't think too badly of me—I have tried to stick it but I'll go crazy if I stay a day longer And don't worry about me, Dad. One of my American friends wrote me he'd find me a job at his base so I'll be took care of I won't never ask for help again, and thanks for all what you did Gloria.

"We—ll!" gasped Connie, her flushed downy face puckered.

"I can't say I'm surprised," said Clare. "Poor Gloria! I think we should have realized she would never settle down to being a housewife in Tiddler's Cottage."

"Like her mother," muttered Mellors, "never satisfied, no matter how much you did for her."

"Well, I think it's disgraceful!" exclaimed Connie. "She had *us*—she was often over here and I always minded poor little Johnnie when she wanted an afternoon in Brighton. How *could* she leave that poor little baby?"

Then Connie clapped a hand to her mouth.

"Don't say she's left that child alone in the cottage."

"She has!" nodded Clare's father. "I ran over there as soon as I got this note. The little 'un was asleep upstairs, and a nice mess things are over there, too."

"We must fetch him back here at once," said Connie.

Mellors threw her a warm glance. He turned to his daughter.

"Your Mum's been an angel to that girl and to the little boy. He is no flesh and blood of hers but she has treated him as though he was, bless her."

"Well, he's *your* grandson, isn't he?" said Connie to her husband.

Clare contemplated her parents in a wondering way. It was extraordinary how they loved each other. As a rule the very sight of their mutual admiration irritated her but somehow it had the opposite effect this afternoon. She felt strengthened by their unity—it was one thing she could always be sure of.

It was a good thing that she had had that fortnight up in Derbyshire, she thought; those quiet, lovely hours with Sir Clifford. They had given her a new sense of proportion. She felt better able to adjust herself to life, less inclined to criticize.

She said:

"Come on, we'll go down and get the baby."

Connie threw her daughter a grateful glance. They walked out of the farmhouse together and through the sunshine towards Tiddler's Cottage.

Never had Clare seen the country look lovelier. It was hard to believe there was a terrible war in progress—so

much death and disaster throughout the world. On the way down in the train, Clare had been worrying about Colin and Evelyn She had intended to telephone the Brighton hospital as soon as she reached the house.

The sky was so blue, it had almost a Mediterranean look today. The gently sloping Downs were greeny-gold in the slight haze of heat hanging over them on this warm July afternoon.

As Clare and her mother opened one of the field gates and moved past the herd of Friesians, she caught that rich familiar odour of cattle and it reminded her of her childhood when she used to come out in the field with Father and take her little mug and be given a drink of warm milk fresh from one of the cows.

Tiddler's Lake was encircled by beech trees which threw a warm shade into the mirror of the cool water. And now they reached a row of cottages, in the first of which young Johnnie had been born The place had a forlorn air even from outside Obviously Gloria had had neither time nor inclination to cultivate her garden The front was choked with weeds and only a few straggling nasturtiums lent a vivid hue of orange and yellow

Once inside the living-room, Clare and her mother were absolutely united in their dismay as they surveyed the scene. Through the open door in the kitchen they could see the sink piled with dirty dishes, cups and saucepans. The draining-board was barely visible under a pile of empty tin cans and crockery. There was also an unwashed baby's bottle, and on a plate the head, tail and guts of a herring which, no doubt, had been Gloria's supper last night. On the table stood half a loaf, some greasy butter and a jug of milk. Flies buzzed around the remains of the herring. Connie and Clare both turned from this unsavoury sight and stared at each other

"Father said the baby was upstairs . . ." began Connie.

At that moment they heard a wail which was rapidly developing into a bellow of rage.

The two women ran upstairs The casement windows in Gloria's bedroom were shut It was very hot up here, due to the low ceiling, and the air smelt appalling It made Clare feel sick

"Heavens! Is this how she's been keeping house?"

Connie's lips compressed.

"I often had to lecture the girl about hygiene. It just wasn't any use The vicar was telling me some of the evacuees are as bad. It's unbelievable."

They looked gloomily at Gloria's unspeakable bedroom. The sheets were grey, the blankets heaped together There were bits of paper, stockings and odd articles of clothing which Gloria hadn't wanted, strewn upon the floor A transparent cheap black nylon nightgown had been flung across the back of a chair, no doubt forgotten in Gloria's last rush to catch her train.

Clare's imagination worked as she looked at that nightgown. She could sense in a way what that unhappy girl must have been feeling . . . mad with boredom and loathing the motherhood which had been forced on her, lured back to her old life by a G I. Had she felt some compunction, wondered Clare, when she came finally to leave her small son Had she given one backward look at the sleeping child, afraid that her better nature might in the end prevent her from going?

The cot stood by the window From it rose an odour which made even Clare, the hardened nurse, wrinkle her nose

"It really is disgusting," she breathed

The two women now walked to the cot and stared down at the abandoned Johnnie He was scarlet. Tears oozed from his eyes. His clenched fists beat the air with wrath, with mute reproach And now Clare saw the reddish-gold curls on the tiny head and somehow they gave her a queer feeling of tenderness and even surprise His hair was the same colour as her own—the Mellors' red-gold hair. Johnnie had grown a lot since Clare had last seen him He had become a person

It was she who suddenly lifted the smelly little bundle out of the cot and passed a hand over the hot, perspiring forehead

"He's absolutely boiling, Mother. Phew! This room Do open the windows, for heaven's sake How could anyone exist up here and not feel asphyxiated."

Connie groaned

"I don't think the poor baby would be alive if I hadn't come down every day to get him out into the garden. I

had to nag Gloria into feeding him properly. She just hadn't a clue. Oh, Clare, you don't know what a trial she's been."

"I can guess, and I think you've been marvellous, Mother."

"The baby's hungry. I'll go down and heat his bottle," said Connie

Connie ran downstairs feeling an immense gratitude for this support from Clare, Clare of *all* people, she thought.

But she found no hot water. The boiler was out. The cylinder of calor gas was empty. Gloria could have done nothing much, Connie thought in disgust, but lie on her bed and smoke and read the most lurid type of sexy paper-backs

It ended in Clare searching for some clean baby clothes, but finding everything soiled.

"It's too frightful!" Connie wailed. "We gave Gloria a complete layette."

"Perhaps there's something up at the house that will do for the poor little rabbit," said Clare. "We'd better take him straight up there."

She didn't at all mind holding the infant, messy though he was. He was really quite attractive. It gave her a strange desire to hold him even closer to her breast when he suddenly stopped howling, opened very blue eyes—as blue as flax—and gave her a toothless smile. How helpless he was, she thought, and how dependent on somebody like herself.

She heard her mother's voice. It sounded embarrassed.

"Clare, I've still got all your baby clothes at home, put away in moth balls in a box I didn't let Gloria have them because I thought you might like them for *your* children."

"Gracious!" said Clare and flushed. Her mother didn't know whether her exclamation was one of amusement or protest.

"Well, I didn't think you'd want Gloria to have them—" began Connie, timidly.

Now Clare interrupted.

"Let's use what you think the baby needs. By all means let's make use of my things."

Clare carried the child over the sunlit fields and back to the farmhouse. Johnnie was still hungry and had begun to cry again She took him straight up to the bathroom.

Connie rushed upstairs to find the box of treasures and get a clean vest and dress for the boy. She even found a

pile of nappies. She had kept everything that had belonged to her much-loved baby daughter All the things she had bought for Clare were expensive and had been carefully, lovingly laundered.

Clare quickly and skilfully removed Johnnie's dirty clothes and put him into a warm bath His howls quietened as he felt the comfort of the water and the freedom for his chafed little bottom which, Clare noted in horror, was almost raw. He splashed and cooed like a pigeon

"Poor little thing! You hadn't much of a mother," she said aloud.

Connie found vaseline in the medicine cupboard and Clare greased the red patches and put on the clean nappies. Soon Johnnie was dry and better dressed than Connie had ever seen him. She thought how magnificently Clare was behaving and what a kindness she had done, allowing Gloria's child to wear her own baby clothes.

"I wish your father could see Johnnie look like that!" cried Connie delighted.

And Oliver did see him for he came in just as Clare was giving the baby the bottle which Connie had prepared from the directions on a tin of National Dried Milk she'd brought up from the cottage

The man looked with gratitude and a certain amount of surprise at his beautiful daughter with the child on her lap. Never for a moment had he imagined Clare could be so good with an infant It confirmed his belief that all women were by instinct maternal

"You've done a champion job, lass," he said, "and I thank you."

Clare said nothing but bent over the baby, moving the teat of the bottle between his toothless gums because he had stopped sucking and lay staring at her with a profound, primeval wisdom in his round blue eyes

"What are you going to do with this funny little object?" she asked, gruffly, in order to hide her own sensation of pleasure in feeding the baby

Let her go. Either we put Johnnie up for adoption, or we keep him here And I wouldn't dream of letting your grandson go to strangers, Oliver"

The man did not speak for a momenr. He put his pipe in his pocket. Through all the years—even in those days when he had felt the first overwhelming wave of desire for her—he had never loved his wife more than in this hour His lips twitched. He turned away, walked to the window and looked out, too moved to say a word. Connie followed him She put an arm around his narrow waist under the old jacket which he wore on the farm

"It's all right, Grandpa," she said with a laugh and nuzzled his shoulder with her cheek. "It's all right, darling. I'm really quite fond of Johnnie and we'll bring him up the way he should go—that is, if Clare doesn't mind"

"I don't mind," said Clare very quickly, although she, herself, was surprised, that she could say this so quickly A little while ago she would have objected very strongly, but in a curious way, now that she was back at Swanningdean, she felt no rancour, no hostility, nothing but an immense envy of her simple-hearted, primitive parents. Here they were, middle-aged, living only for each other and soon, Clare was positive, they would be as wrapped up in the little boy. It would give them something new to live for

It was curious that even as she sat there with Gloria's infant on her lap, giving it the last drop in the bottle, watching Johnnie's eye blink and close in sleep, her own thoughts winged to Wragby; to the dignity and beauty of Sir Clifford's library; to the memory of herself sitting beside the white-haired man in the wheel-chair; to his last words of advice:

> "People can't live altogether on an intellectual plane. There can be no survival for life without the attraction of male for female and vice versa"

Those words had echoed and re-echoed in her mind ever since she heard them They were rather worrying words because she couldn't imagine herself ever being attracted enough by a man to want to live and die for him

She was still stunned with the impact of her visit to Wragby; still bewildered by the fact that her mother had

left Sir Clifford for Father How could she have done so—no matter how nice or attractive Father was?

Yet today for the first time she *envied* her mother.

That night, Johnnie Coutts and his few belongings were moved from Tiddler's Cottage to Swanningdean Farm Plans were made for his welfare and upbringing. Clare sat listening to her parents talk—both touched and amused by the simple pleasures they found in the idea that they could bring Johnnie up just as they wanted Clare even put in a comic word

"Now you've got a future partner for your farm, Father."

"Ay, that's so," he said, pleased

Women were queer creatures They could adapt themselves to changes like this so quickly They were so pliable; emotionally unstable, yet firm as a rock in their determination to succour the very young and helpless. *He* could not recover so quickly from the ugly thought that his daughter had abandoned her baby son and gone back to a life which he found too distasteful to contemplate.

Later, Clare and her mother talked alone in Clare's little bedroom Connie once more thanked her daughter for all that she had done today.

"Your father's awfully grateful, darling He told me just now how much he admired you. You've made us both so happy"

"I'm glad," said Clare, colouring

"Now aren't you going to tell me about *him*?" Connie asked, sitting on Clare's bed.

She wore a dressing-gown. Her long fair hair was unbound Seeing her like this, Clare could well believe how handsome and charming she was as a girl and how much those two men, Sir Clifford and Father, must have loved her.

Rather guardedly, Clare repeated much of the news that she had already written to her mother about Wragby Hall She answered, in an equally guarded way, her mother's questions Obviously, Mother was filled with curiosity Up to a point, Clare pandered to it She was quite willing to give a description of the house and grounds and to describe Sir Clifford and his present way of life

Connie listened with avid interest, nodding now and again.

"Just fancy!" she exclaimed, "Clifford going so white. He

used to be as fair as fair. But he seems very well, according to you."

"Yes, very well on the whole, although he tells me he has a heart condition and has to be careful."

"Poor Clifford."

"I don't think he needs pity," said Clare, quietly.

She was sitting at her dressing-table brushing her beautiful hair with long, sweeping strokes She had her face turned from her mother. Connie looked anxiously at that straight young back.

"You got on very well with him, didn't you, Clare?"

"Yes!"

"I thought you might get on, you two," said Connie in a low voice. "Did he speak much of me?"

This was where Clare did not want to be too expansive. She answered:

"Yes, and very, very nicely I think he loved you, Mother"

Connie's face grew hot and pink. She twisted her fingers together.

"I'm sure he did. And I'm sure you must think badly of me because I walked out of Wragby. You never *could* understand."

"Don't let us discuss that," said Clare, gently but firmly.

How strange and strong she is, this daughter I brought into the world, thought Connie Mellors.

But suddenly instead of the jealousy that she thought she might feel because Clare had taken such a fancy to Clifford (a jealousy that was purely on Oliver's behalf), she felt proud She was proud because Clifford had accepted her daughter and liked her.

"Well, I'm glad your holiday went so well and you got so much pleasure out of meeting Clifford," she said

"Thank you, Mother."

Connie cleared her throat

"Try to be tolerant of what I did, will you, dear? Try to understand how strong real love can be"

Silence a moment. Then from Clare:

"Maybe I shall never experience that sort of love but I can at least hope I might find it one day."

Connie felt suddenly uplifted by this. She had never known Clare to admit there could be a love so passionate that it could sweep a woman right off her feet. She asked

Clare about the gamekeeper's hut

'I hope you didn't mind my suggesting that you went to see it."

"I didn't see it, Mother. Sir Clifford had it taken down years ago"

Connie's face puckered and she looked as though she was going to cry.

"Oh!" she cried, softly and in protest. "Oh! how sad. I hate to hear that"

Surely, thought Clare, *you must realise the violence of spirit which made him pull that hut to pieces? It was the measure of his anger and grief when you ran away.* Now she felt no more of the extreme friendliness and sympathy which had been flowing between her mother and herself today.

"I must go to sleep I'm so tired," she said abruptly and yawned, pretending to be drowsy.

But Connie was not deceived As she left her daughter's bedroom she realised that she had been premature in supposing that she could get really close to Clare—and remain close The girl was too remote—too far outside the orbit within which her parents moved.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

It was a chilly, foggy Saturday morning ten days after Christmas

Clare was on a week's leave She needed it She had been working—like all the hospital staff—at full pressure through the difficult winter months Three days ago she had come of age Funny how little a personal affair like that mattered in war-time As a young girl she had thought of her twenty-first birthday as a big milestone—an exciting cause for celebration But now it had meant nothing more than a few congratulations from her friends at the hospital, presents from her parents, Aunt Hilda and Pip, and a small

dinner party which Aunt Hilda held at the Hyde Park Hotel. Clare's mother and father had meant to be there but at the last moment, Little Johnnie—now nearly eight months old, developed ear trouble and had run such a high temperature that Connie wouldn't leave him and of course, Clare's father wouldn't leave *her*.

Looking back, it brought no unhappiness to Clare to remember that she and her coming-of-age had been put aside for the sake of Gloria's child. She had grown used to the thought of Johnnie as being part of the household at Swanningdean Farm—even glad that the baby seemed to bring so much happiness to her middle-aged parents. He certainly belonged to them wholly. Gloria had not written once nor made the slightest attempt to see her baby. Clare had even grown fond of the chubby little fellow herself, and she had been worried about his health.

But the unity at home had the effect of making Clare all the more conscious of the fact that she had to walk alone and must depend on nobody for her heart's happiness.

On the whole it had not been a bad winter for her, personally. When she had first returned to hospital, Matron had said that they could not at the moment find a suitable transfer and Clare had so far recovered from her nervous breakdown that she had volunteered to remain in London and carry on as before. She really loved her work in the hospital and was quite happy in a busy, occupied way. Liz was away on frequent spells of compassionate leave. Clare missed her friendship but more than that—grieved for the reason for her absence. Francis was ill. He had always been delicate and now he had developed leukaemia. Clare was greatly distressed by the thought of the young charming man, with his great gift for painting, gradually growing weaker. Liz helped her mother to look after him and keep him as cheerful as possible, but in her last letter Liz had said that Francis was not expected to live much longer.

He always talks so affectionately of you and looks foward to any news that I give him.

Clare had cried quite unashamedly over this. It seemed awful that Francis had to die without even the glory of being killed in defence of his country. And it made her feel almost guilty because she hadn't been able to love him as he had loved her.

The whole thing upset her so much that she got a special leave pass on two occasions to go up to Long Endon on the night train, see Francis and come down again the next day.

On the first occasion she found him lying out in the garden reading He no longer had the energy to paint, or even sketch He looked, she thought sadly, as though a breath of wind would blow him away He seemed to have no notion that he was dying, neither did he discuss his illness beyond saying that he "wasn't at all well", and added that he would get over it, and finish her portrait.

He seemed so overjoyed to lie still, holding her hand, that her heart went out to him In an impulsive way she even suggested that she had missed him so much that she was inclined to reconsider his proposal of marriage—that was if he still wanted her This seemed to bring him indescribable happiness. But on the second visit he hardly had strength to smile or do more than recognize her and fall asleep. His mother told Clare before she left Long Endon that she had made his last days wonderfully contented and that the family was very grateful He died three weeks later. Clare was deeply distressed and the only thing that really comforted her was a long letter from Sir Clifford quoting for her the words of the immortal Shelley in "The Death of Adonis".

> He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
> Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
> And that unrest which men miscall delight
> Can touch him not and torture not again;
> From the contagion of the world's slow stain
> He is secure . . .

She was deeply comforted by this philosophy and wrote several times to Clifford about Francis. One of her chief outlets was corresponding with Clifford Chatterley. He sent immediate and painstaking replies to her letters touching on her work, his own at Wragby—the world events in general—always written with a dry wit, quite brilliant in his analysis of current events

During these last six months there had been no love affair in Clare's life. One or two young men had taken her out and wanted to kiss her or get on to a more intimate basis but

she had felt no desire for anything beyond the most casual "date" She had found herself caught up in the drama that was going on around the Talbots. Much had happened to both Colin and his Wren wife

Clare had become good friends with the Assistant Matron of St. James's Hospital who had more to do with Colin, personally, than the Matron herself, and kept Clare informed of his progress. Miss Ellerton told her about Evelyn's visits and how distressed she seemed each time she saw her husband; how Colin, having passed through the first anguish and horror of his facial wounds, had come to dread his wife's visits because she could not hide her distress from him.

"He is a wonderful character," Ellerton told Clare. "You would think she was the one to be pitied and not him, the way she goes on. I've never heard him complain about himself and he's had a filthy time."

Clare had answered:

"I can believe that He was the same when I nursed him."

Everybody was sorry for Colin's pretty little wife who came once a month all the way from Leith, where she was now stationed, to see the slow progress her husband was making and to try and accustom herself to the shattering difference that the last injury had made to his face.

That difference had even shaken Clare, the professional nurse, when she had first seen Colin without his bandages, some long time after he was first admitted into St James's

She had sat beside him laughing, joking, reminding him of the old ward up in London, recalling amusing incidents about young Tubby, the awful Cas and "Effing-Evans".

But Colin remained little more than a bandaged mummy struggling to talk normally and pretending that he was all right. His face and both hands were badly damaged. He had been climbing out of the turret of his tank when it received a direct hit and a brother officer had only just managed to pull him out of the blazing tank in time to save his life.

He had already suffered a long period of surgical operations; days when he knew nothing but a terrible thirst, slept only under drugs, and woke screaming.

Only will-power—and, Clare was sure—his tremendous love for Evelyn, gave him the necessary will to carry on.

On the one or two occasions when Clare saw him alone,

wore dark glasses, pads of cotton wool under the lashless eyes, a mask over the shattered chin.

Sir Arthur had tried all kinds of new experiments. Colin had been quite blind when he first went into hospital but after the application of saline compresses he had been able to see again . . . but there were long weary months ahead of him. So much grafting to be done, the eyelids to be remade and even though he might get up and go out in between operations, he wasn't any too anxious to take part in normal life. He felt disinclined to take out the charming and companionable girls who were organized to escort the badly-disfigured officers to entertainments. Clare told Evelyn about these girls—pointing out gently that Evelyn must try to emulate their example for none of them showed the slightest sign that they found anything repulsive in some of the terrible faces that were indeed terrible before the specialists had finished with them.

"I will try," Evelyn kept saying pitifully, "I will. I love him, you know."

But Clare thought the declaration from Evelyn was not so much one of love as a cry of despair.

Clare was on her way now to the hospital to see Colin. Miss Ellerton had telephoned her at the flat and told her that Captain Talbot had expressed a special wish to see her.

"I think he's got something on his mind he wants to discuss with you He seems very worried so do try to come as soon as you can, Clare," the Assistant Matron had said

"I'm due for some leave," Clare replied promptly "I'll get it this week-end"

She found Colin in the officers' sitting-room reserved especially for the plastic surgery cases. He wore a dressing-gown. His hands which had not been so badly burned as his face were free of bandages now He was smoking and she could see that his hair was beginning to grow It had been singed. He wasn't an attractive sight, poor dear, she thought. And yet the man's courage and nobility of character were stamped upon him in an indescribable way. As his nurses said, he never seemed to get ill-tempered or rattled nor did he indulge in grousing

His voice was quite strong and clear as he greeted Clare. "Lovely to see you, my dear."

She took off her uniform coat and spread her fingers to

the blaze of the fire. It was a bitterly cold, raw day and she was glad of the warmth of this room. There was another officer in a dressing-gown sitting in a chair reading a paper, but after a moment he got up, greeted Clare and then *shuffled off*

Colin laughed. It was always a wonder to Clare that he could still laugh after so many months of frightful suffering

"I think he imagines you're my girl-friend and is being tactful."

"Oh, good show," said Clare, lightly, and then: "What news of Evelyn?"

"It's about Evelyn that I want to talk to you," he said in a low voice, and pulled his chair up closer to Clare's He offered her a cigarette, and lit it for her with a spill from the fire

His glasses fell off and for a moment Clare saw the red-rimmed lashless eyes which were so frighteningly unreal somehow, so tragic in that mask of a face Poor dear Colin! Yet he put the glasses on again and spoke coolly:

"I'm not a pretty sight, am I?"

"You know I don't think about it—I mean whether you're a pretty sight or not. You're always just Colin to me"

"I wish to God Evelyn felt that way," he suddenly broke out on a different note—a note of real and intense pain.

Fear stabbed at Clare's heart.

"Why do you say that?"

"It is what I want to talk to you about, Clare. She's been offered a posting to Malta She could get out of it on the grounds of being married and having me home, but Sir Arthur tells me I'll be in and out of the operating theatre for another twelve months at least while he builds up this jolly old face of mine Evelyn said of course she was going to ask if she could stay in England so as to be near me *but I think it would be better if she went abroad*—got right away from everything What do you think, Clare?"

Clare leaned forward and warmed her hands at the fire.

hear him say a thing like this She pitied poor little Evelyn who could not help her weakness of character—but she also felt cross with her. Even if she could not help her feelings. Evelyn should not have let her husband guess them. What had she done to make Colin think this way?

Colin, as though reading Clare's mind, made haste to say that it was entirely his own concept of the situation that made him talk like this.

"You see," he said, "I've tried at times to convince myself that my disfigurement has had no real effect on Evelyn's fundamental feelings for me. But now I'm not sure."

"Oh, Colin, you're wrong—"

"Don't try to say that just to cheer me up," he cut in, gruffly. "Perhaps I'm over-sensitive, Clare—but during the last three or four visits I've had from Evelyn, I've noticed the change in her."

"What sort of change?"

"At first, she used to weep copiously, poor darling, and bury her face against my shoulder and tell me that she loved me and that nothing could ever alter her love. But lately she's become very quiet and remote from me. Last time she was here we were like strangers. It was as though all our passionate love and joy in each other had never existed. She was sweet and gentle and full of tender inquiries and expressed the hope that everything would be all right for me soon, but . . . *she wasn't* demonstrative and affectionate God knows I'm still very much in love with her," he added with an unhappy laugh, "and when I made a movement as though to kiss her, I could see her tighten up . . she goes so white . . . her eyes get enormous . . . like a frightened child's. She moved away at once and talked about something amusing—warding me off I don't blame her, Clare It must be ghastly for her—the mere thought of being kissed by a gargoyle like myself—"

Now Clare interrupted, her face flushed, her whole being suffused with passionate resentment against this thing that he was trying to put over to her.

"It isn't true, Colin, I'm sure it isn't true. You imagined it."

"I don't think so," he said quietly

"You're so much better, and after the next graft on your eyes you'll be marvellous Sir Arthur told Miss Ellerton so, and *she* told me You're going to be made a new man."

"Perhaps. But I'll always be scarred and a bit different and meanwhile I'm like this . . ." he touched his bandages. "Maybe Evelyn hasn't much imagination and can't see beyond what I look like now."

Clare opened her mouth to speak, then shut it again. She had never felt more distressed She was appalled by the thought of what this must mean to Colin.

"Anyhow I'm terribly worried about the effect it's having on Evelyn," he said

"I could contact her tomorrow. She's still in London and I'll make a point of talking to her Just tell me what you want me to say."

"I want you to persuade her to go to Malta Every human being has his limitations. Some can stand up to horrible sights Others can't. One shouldn't blame those who faint at the sight of blood or are sick when others are sick Maybe it'll be better if my poor darling doesn't see me again until Sir Arthur has finished with me"

Clare stayed talking with him for a while then went to see her friend the Assistant Matron

Miss Ellerton was a bit gloomy about the matter.

"I must say I don't think that poor little Mrs Talbot is very strong-minded and I agree with her husband—every human being has his limitations I fancy Mrs Talbot, although very pretty and charming, is superficial—she just can't take it"

"It upsets me," said Clare, her eyes clouded, "because I always thought she was so right for him"

"My dear, he isn't what he *was!* Let's be factual I know you'll talk about the spirit being the same but some folks can't see through the horrors to that shining courage of the soul"

"What chance do you think he has of ever looking normal again?"

"One doesn't know It may take years to build a new face But Captain Talbot is usually so cheerful and charming, after a few minutes one doesn't notice his defects"

"It's different for you, Miss Ellerton, and for me too with our hospital experience, but I believe Evelyn—Mrs Talbot—saw him without the bandage on his chin the other day and nearly passed out. It must have been pretty grim for *him*"

"The trouble is," said Miss Ellerton, "that the streptococcus keeps putting these cases back. Sir Arthur has to make additional grafts on some of them when they go wrong That left eyelid of Captain Talbot's isn't really right yet, and his lower lip is badly enlarged if you noticed"

"Oh, God," said Clare, "I hope Mrs Talbot will pull herself together He only lives for her And apart from what he suffers physically he needs all the encouragement and confidence his wife can give him."

Clare talked to Evelyn the following day. Evelyn visited her at the flat and had a drink. Pip was not in Aunt Hilda had said a few kind words to Evelyn and then left the girls alone.

"Colin *wants* me to go to Malta, and perhaps it *is* best while he's having all these operations"

"But you can't really want to leave him just now," Clare had explained. "It may be a long time before he is quite fit again"

Tears gushed from Evelyn's eyes. She was deeply upset —for Colin as well as herself

"I can't bear to hurt him, Clare—he's been so badly hurt already. But I haven't got your strength of mind I know you can talk to him and not show a thing But his face makes me feel sick—yes, *sick!*"

"But Evelyn," Clare cried, shocked and quite angry, "you've got to try and fight this feeling"

"I do try to." She was sobbing now, her face hidden in her hands "All the time I'm fighting my feelings But I just haven't your strength and I don't know what I'm going to do"

Clare spent an hour wrestling with her—trying to infuse some of her strength into this unhappy girl She could not even be contemptuous of her People couldn't always help their weaknesses Evelyn was the type who just could not bear what she called "horrors" She could not stand it, she said, when Colin came too close to her. When he kissed her good-bye she had a ghastly desire to turn and run away before he could do so

That seemed to Clare both pitiable and terrible She hardly knew what to say Evelyn looked at Clare. She said, forlornly.

"I suppose you despise me"

"Of course not. I'm just trying to understand."

"You mean *you* could go through with it—if you were in love—if Colin was your husband?"

"How can I answer that? It's a problem I haven't had to face"

Clare said that out of delicacy—a wish not to make Evelyn feel too ashamed Somehow she felt quite sure that if she had ever loved a man enough to become his wife, his dreadful facial injuries would have drawn her closer to him—closer in spirit, anyhow The spirit would be stronger than the body *Should be*

But who am I to judge? Clare asked herself inwardly. *I haven't come up to scratch so many times, although in a different way from Evelyn I've always been so afraid of loving completely We all have certain complexes and difficulties None of us should be too critical of others. If we are, we're hypocrites*

Evelyn was openly sobbing now.

"I feel so terrible. In my heart I love Colin though you may not believe me"

"Poor Evelyn," said Clare, and put an arm around the trembling figure and stroked the curly hair

She sat listening to Evelyn reproaching herself until it became unbearable Then she said.

"It's no use going on like this Perhaps it *would* be best for you to go to Malta"

Evelyn stopped crying and blew her nose She looked through swollen eyelids at the other girl, for all the world, Clare thought, like an unhappy child that has done wrong and knows it but cannot undo it

How strange that a man like Colin—who had all the depth and courage of the very strong—should have loved and married a girl of such shallow nature—a girl incapable of strong enduring love

"Help me!" Evelyn kept pleading

There was only one way Clare could help and she promised to do it She, personally, would go, she said, and see Colin as often as possible while Evelyn was abroad and try to make him feel that his wife still loved him with all her heart but had gone away only because *he* wished it—because he had said he would be happier if she stayed away until he both looked better—and felt it.

After Evelyn left, Clare felt as though all her own strength

had been drained from her. She did not go to bed that night until she had written to Colin and told him the result of this talk with Evelyn. She ended:

> Never doubt that she loves you. I know you'll miss each other but I'm sure this is all for the best And think of the glorious reunion when Evelyn comes back from Malta and you're as handsome as before.

She received a very brief note by return.

> Thank you, dear Clare. You're a wonderful friend to us both.

She did not see Colin again for three weeks and then after an unexpected development—one of those grim shattering tragedies that are the consequence of war.

Miss Ellerton rang Clare up at her aunt's flat.

"For goodness sake come down and see Captain Talbot as soon as you can."

"Why, is he bad? Wasn't the last op. a success—?" began Clare.

Miss Ellerton interrupted:

"No—no—the operation was a complete success. It's Mrs. Talbot. The ship taking her to Malta has been torpedoed and she wasn't among the survivors. Captain Talbot is terribly shocked and I think a visit from you might help. He won't talk to anyone and he looks ghastly—maybe you can help."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Clare sat beside Colin holding fast to one of his hands with both of hers.

They were alone in the visitor's room. After a long silence, Colin broke out harshly.

"I made her go, Clare I feel it's my fault she has died. I wanted her to go—"

"Don't say that. Don't think it It's ridiculous. She was posted to Malta and she *wanted* to go"

"But I could have kept her back I could have persuaded her to stay in England," came from Colin in the same hard voice

"She might have been bombed here," argued Clare

But she struggled against the desire to weep, Colin had had so much to bear—it seemed so cruel that he should have to suffer this loss as well Evelyn had been his first love, young and beautiful It must be horrible for him to think of all that beauty and sweetness, that youthful charm, lost for all time, buried in a cold sea grave When she'd first heard the news she wished she had tried to persuade Evelyn not to take that posting But her thoughts soon began to move into a different channel

Now Evelyn would always be wonderful and heroic in Colin's eyes and he would be able to remember her with pride as well as love He would never know the weakness in her love for him

It would have been much worse if she had lived and grown apart from him, she might gradually have shaken his belief in her love and turned him into a bitter, disillusioned man In a way, this tragedy was a mercy, but of course, she could never offer this as comfort to him without betraying Evelyn's true character

"She was so young and sweet Oh, damn those bloody Germans. Damn this bloody war," he said on a cracked note of despair.

She pressed his fingers In her mouth she tasted the salt of her own tears But she went on wrestling with him

"Don't, *don't* let it hurt you too much Colin And all through this awful time in hospital—you've been *so* brave You've got so far For God's sake, go on fighting She'd have wanted you to You know that"

Finally he relaxed a little and Clare felt that some of the initial shock was over and that he was more normal.

When she left him she did not notice his disfigurement but only his pain as he put her hand against his cheek and murmured:

"Thank you for coming Evelyn loved you. You've always helped us both God bless you, Clare."

She spoke to Miss Ellerton for a moment. The assistant Matron took a look at Clare's drawn face and said:

"Don't shoulder too many burdens, my dear. You're not all that strong yourself You look worn out."

"I'm just tired. One becomes emotionally quite stupefied by this sort of thing It's all so terrible. But I hope I've convinced him a little that he should be glad that he's still alive, even though he's lost his wife."

"Come down again soon. I'm sure you do him good."

It's funny, Clare thought in the train going back to London, *that I should do people good. I'm so very little good to myself, or to people as close to me as Mother and Father. It's funny that I'm so much better with strangers and can give them so much more of myself.*

She'd been immensely touched by the way Colin had said those words: "You've always helped us both. God bless you, Clare."

She had always been good friends with Colin. She was thankful now that she could help him She knew that it would take him quite a long time to get over the shock of Evelyn's death.

She stayed down at Swanningdean whenever she went on leave.

Her mother was finding her much changed and was troubled because of her extreme thinness and a new sadness in her eyes. Yet, as Connie remarked, Clare seemed to have gained in spiritual strength and found a new tranquillity. That was good. A little while ago she had seemed so restless and difficult. Now nothing much seemed to upset her. She was rarely irritable.

Oliver Mellors had his own comments.

"T'lass has had to face up to more important things than her love affairs. Those two deaths—young Peverel's and Mrs. Talbot's—have disturbed her quite a bit"

"Poor darling," said Connie "It makes me wish all the more that she could meet the right man and get married. She needs looking after. I find her pathetic these days"

"Strangely enough, I don't," said Clare's father. "I find her all the better for coming to grips with life and herself. She's learning to conquer both."

February came; first the snowdrops, then the purple, yellow and striped crocii fringing the trees in Connie's little

garden; then the gales swept from the coast over the Downs, rattling the casements of the old farmhouse.

It was a wild, wet spring

Clare saw Colin once a week.

There was no further need for anxiety about his state of mind As she had anticipated, his practical side conquered the emotional one Although the light of real happiness had for the present been quenched from him He had so much to conquer, she thought Poor Colin! He had to endure one grafting after another and got up only to go back to bed again He regained strength of body only to lose it

The physical pain he suffered as a "guinea-pig" for Sir Arthur was of small account to Colin Other men in the ward as well as the nurses, told Clare that his courage was phenomenal

At first he talked continually about Evelyn He received visits from several members of her family and their mutual friends Everybody was sympathetic and kind

Then came the day when he no longer spoke about Evelyn at all But Clare knew that it was not because he had forgotten but because he had begun to accept her death and his own loss He was mainly interested now in his recovery Soon he would be out of the Army. He began to study and look forward to that day. He was also able quite calmly to examine his face in a mirror and discuss his operations with Clare when she came down to see him

Summer approached and he was still in hospital It was a long, trying period for him and those like him

Gradually the time came when he could remove his dark glasses, when his eyes were normal again and when his face, although still badly scarred, was no longer terrible It was once more a *face* But it would never be quite normal and he knew it He would never again look like the Colin whom Evelyn had loved so passionately

"The old mug isn't doing too badly, is it?" Colin once said to Clare with some of the old boyish charm

"It's doing fine," said Clare with enthusiasm Not for the first time she felt that it was a good thing Fate had removed Evelyn from his life *She* might have found even this new face difficult to accept without a tremor of distaste.

CHAPTER TWENTY

By June, 1945, the war in Europe was over.

Men no longer fought desperately to gain the balance of power. The horrors on land, on sea and in the sky were passing. There remained only the final horror—the defeat of Japan which, with all its terrible finality, was yet to come

Sirens ceased to wail their sinister warning from one end of England to the other. The burden put upon the hospitals was easing and in Clare's life the frantic battle against time and a ceaseless flow of patients through the wards of her own hospital grew noticeably less.

It was for Clare a strangely uneventful summer—a kind of hiatus. For so long she had little time in which to think, and apart from her one breakdown she had never missed a day's work.

Although she knew she could stay on at the hospital and that there would be much to do for a long while, she felt lost and curiously disintegrated after V.E. Day. It was as though everything was coming to an end for her. She would have to start thinking about a completely new life

At the end of August, there would be no place for her to live because Aunt Hilda was moving out of London. She had taken a cottage with one of her old friends in Hampshire and Pip was getting married. Pip had astonished the whole family by bringing back a Canadian Colonel ten years older than herself, a widower, who seemed to have complete control over her. She intended to go out to Prince Edward Island with him as soon as he was demobilized and she could get a passage. He was a doctor.

Clare envied her cousin Pip was so genuinely happy, interesting, too, to see the once frivolous Pip dominated and even humble in her approach to marriage.

"You've just got to find someone like Bob and settle down," she told Clare happily.

Clare answered.

"I doubt I'll ever find the right man."

This was the Clare who emerged from the storm clouds of a six-year-old war; a Clare who remembered her several love affairs as feverish dreams which occasionally crept back to haunt and disturb her. Robin . . Hamilton . . . Craig . . Jacques . . . She hadn't seen or heard of any of them until at a party which she attended on V.E Day she came across Robin. They were dining and dancing at the same restaurant He was still in uniform and with a pretty, plump girl He passed Clare's table while he was dancing and for a moment looked hesitant and even sheepish, then came across and introduced her to his partner This was his wife and they had been married for over a year now, he said. They were expecting a child

Clare was surprised to find how little the meeting with Robin and his wife affected her She felt only glad, having seen Robin again, that she hadn't married him.

Wasn't there a French proverb to the effect that everything passes and only friendship remains? Well, she had friends in plenty and for the moment they were enough. But there were often moments when she felt indescribably lonely; when she looked at herself in the mirror and thought: *I want to be loved. I don't want to live the rest of my life alone*

The old fear pursued her that even if she did meet another man who attracted her, who offered love, it would go wrong again

She saw Colin often They were old, tried friends by now. The end of the war had not meant the end of suffering for him. He was still in the hands of specialists and the skin-grafts on his face were repeated There was still the need to re-orientate his life and emotions and it was a never-ceasing wonder to Clare that he faced every fresh grafting—both failures and successes—with a dogged determination not to let his private little world come tumbling about his ears.

One fine Saturday in June, Clare took him to Swanningdean on a forty-eight hour leave She was delighted because her father seemed to get on so well with Colin. Her mother adored him.

"I think he's so nice, so sweet. It doesn't seem to matter at all about his poor face," she declared

"Well, I'm glad you think that way," said Clare. "Of course,

I never notice that there's anything wrong with him these days."

Connie studied her daughter curiously. With the advent of the warm summer weather and several week-ends out in the sun, Clare was looking better and fuller in the face. She'd been so good with Johnnie who was on his feet now and had grown into a really beautiful little boy Clare and Colin had taken him for a walk earlier this morning while Connie stayed at home to make a beefsteak and kidney pie which, Colin announced, was his favourite dish.

Where was her difficult, exacting, argumentative daughter of the old days? Clare really *had* changed.

Now Connie said:

"I never pry into your affairs, Clare, but your father and I think Colin is a little bit in love with you."

Clare laughed.

"Really, Mother. Evelyn's only been dead just over a year and he adored her. I'm just a good friend"

"A year's a long time in the lives of the young."

"Dear old Mum," said Clare, laughing "Because you're such a romantic old thing yourself, you like to think everybody else is the same. There's absolutely *nothing* like that between Colin and myself."

Connie looked disappointed, but said no more.

Clare went upstairs to change into a fresh cotton frock. She and Colin were going out for a picnic on the Downs. It was such a wonderful, hot day But her mother's words lingered with her *Just imagine,* she thought, suggesting that there was anything like that about her friendship with Colin. It was unthinkable. Yet curiously enough, Clifford Chatterley dropped much the same sort of hint Clare had kept up a regular correspondence with Sir Clifford. He knew all about the Talbots and he had written to her about the death of Evelyn in much the same way that he had done after Francis Peverel died. Since then he had asked her several times to try and bring Colin up to stay at Wragby. But Colin had been so much in the hands of his surgeon and doctors, he hadn't been able to make the long journey or leave the hospital for more than a day or two.

In his last letter to Clare, Sir Clifford had said:

You have a facility for affording great comfort to those

in pain or grief. I remember once you told me that you were rather cold of nature That isn't true You are warm And your warmth is sincere and beautiful and capable of thawing the icy crust of misery which encases some of us. I can understand how much you must mean to this young man. You have the gift of being able to offer friendship without pity. Reading between lines in your letters I wonder if he is beginning to want more from you than mere friendship.

Strange that Mother should have had the same idea. Clare hoped to arrange very shortly to take Colin up to meet Sir Clifford

She joined Colin in a speculative mood, which was unusual, for she had grown to feel very much at ease in his company.

They drove out to the Downs

The day was hazy with heat and the hard chalky soil was so dry beneath them that there was no real need for Colin to spread his jacket down for them.

Clare drew in a deep breath, delighting in the sweet smell of grass and wild thyme. She stretched her arms lazily above her head then lay back gazing upward into the brilliant blue The one or two clouds looked like floating bundles of cotton wool

"This is heavenly!" she said. "I can't think of a single place in the whole world I'd rather be I feel completely happy"

Colin gave her a long, thoughtful look. Her beauty, as always, stirred him deeply, but it was not only this that moved him today. He had grown accustomed to and familiar with the red-gold of her striking hair, the fine-cut mouth, the expressive eyes, the supple roundness and grace of her figure But in this moment, as in so many others, it was her mentality that surprised and delighted him

He rolled over on his side and gazed down at her from elbow height.

"You puzzle me, Clare!" he said "I really believe you mean it—that you are completely happy."

"Yes, I am," Clare replied, smiling

He raised his brows then frowned as though struggling for the right words.

"I know people say that in order to find true happiness, one must forget oneself and devote oneself to making others happy. You, at least, prove the saying true. But don't you ever ask anything of life for yourself, Clare? You are too unselfish."

"Of course I'm not. You don't imagine I'm here today just in order to please *you?* Surely you know how much I like being with you, too."

"I can't think why. There are so many other fellows far more—well, amusing and presentable, to take you out Yet you sacrifice yourself again and again to give me your wonderful companionship."

Again Clare shook her head.

"Colin, it is no sacrifice for me to be with you You're everything *I've* ever wanted in a companion We think the same way about life, enjoy the same kind of entertainments, read the same books When I'm with you it's almost like being with my twin."

He stared into those bright beautiful eyes and found her utterly charming, and there could be no doubt about her sincerity She believed what she was saying Yet it seemed to him unnatural as well as incredible A beautiful girl like Clare should be going out to parties and meeting other men—perhaps getting engaged He had absolutely no right to monopolize her.

"You've given me so much . . ." he spoke his thoughts aloud "It's all wrong, Clare You ought to see more of other fellows. You never do!"

"But I don't want anyone else," she exclaimed "I'm happy with you—as happy as I have ever been in my whole life."

"But—why—*why?*" Colin asked "I'm still a physical wreck—not much good to anyone"

"I don't see why or what your looks have to do with this," she argued "It's *you* I love, not your appearance—the you that is deep down . ." she broke off, suddenly, startlingly aware of what she had just said. "It's you I love! . *You I love* . ."

Her hand went to her breast. Her breath was rapid now Her conscious mind accepted and admitted her subconscious meaning. She accepted the fact that she loved Colin—with her whole heart, her mind, her very soul. It was the simple explanation to the pleasure and contentment she al-

ways experienced in his company. It was the simple answer to his own searching questions

Colin frowned hard as he thought over her spontaneous confession. He read the deep feeling in her eyes. She looked almost shy, he thought. And suddenly he was wildly elated. It was such a delightfully warm colour that stole into her cheeks She turned her face away from him, for the first time in his memory unwilling to meet his gaze He was enchanted

"Oh, Clare!" He covered one of her hands with his. "I know you didn't mean it, but it was wonderful to hear what you said. Don't worry, my dear, I'll let you off"

The combination of tenderness and sadness in his voice roused her at once to protest

"But I did mean it It's true. I do love you, Colin. I've never been really in love before, and now that it's finally happened to me, I can't and won't deny it, even though you don't feel the same way about me."

"But of course I love you, Clare. I've loved you for months, and tried damned hard to hide it from you. I felt I couldn't tell you and I never would have done if you hadn't let me know how you feel I wouldn't have felt it fair."

Clare stared back at him, round-eyed with surprise

"But Colin, when Evelyn died you said you'd never love anyone else—never!"

He lay back on the ground lacing his hands behind his head The deep scar beside his mouth looked white and taut She could see how he was having to struggle with himself He was suspended between the past and the present

"That's how I felt at the time," he said at last "But it's a long while ago now, Clare I expect you, more than most people, will appreciate that I've had many, many long hours in which to think—hours when my face was bandaged and I couldn't see, couldn't read—just had to lie and remember. I had to try and find the courage to bear the present as well as face the future I realized then that what Eve and I felt for each other could never have lasted Even if we had married in peace time, she might have left me after the first year It was never deep—never the real, enduring thing"

"But how can you say that, Colin? She *adored* you . . ."

"Yes, as I adored her, on an emotional, unstable plane. It was an attraction of the senses She fell in love with my

good looks—yes, I can say that now, can't I, without sounding conceited! And with the glamour of a uniform, the excitement of a war-time marriage, the thrill of shared leaves, the bitter-sweetness of partings. She had to have that sort of life, activity and change She couldn't bear to be alone with me for more than a short time or she grew restless She loved to dance—to have lots of people around. Even when we were on our honeymoon she wanted the stimulus of other men's admiration I pretended nothing was wrong—it was just her temperament I told myself that if she were any different I might not have loved her so much, that this was war-time and later she'd settle down. Fortunately, perhaps, we never had very long together and when we were together the thrill of our physical passion kept both of us satisfied with each other But that's all there would ever have been to keep us together, even if she had lived."

There was no bitterness in his voice, Clare was stunned as she listened She had been so sure that Colin had believed not only in Evelyn's love but that she would overcome her repugnance and eventually accept his altered appearance.

And all the time he had known the truth. How fantastic, Clare thought, and how utterly loyal he had been.

He continued.

"I loved Evelyn deeply and passionately. I shall never blame her for the way she felt about me But after all this long time, and because I love you so much now, Clare, you have the right to know exactly how I once felt about her I also want you to believe how grateful I am to you I know you tried hard to instil some of your own courage, or sense of duty, or whatever you like to call it, into poor little Eve. It was good of you."

Clare shook her head dumbly. The mild, summer breeze blew across her like a soft fragrant wave. From the heights on which they lay she could see the bluish haze that hung over the cottages and lanes far down in the hollow below the Devil's Dyke. She could see, too, the picturesque outline of the old windmill on the hill. Beyond that hill lay the blue sea and shining dignity of the Regency Brighton and Hove front Aircraft flew overhead constantly. Even now, with her mind full of Colin, she could feel thankful the war was over; that one could be certain those were not

enemy planes Yet she wondered how long it would be before she would ever be able to hear the drone of an engine and not associate it with the horrors and fears of bombing.

She turned again to Colin How nice—how incomparably nice he was. Those hazel eyes of his were still very handsome and full of a wonderful sweetness which transformed the thin, taut flesh of his bony face. She felt nothing but admiration for him and an abiding love When he held out his arms she went into them quite naturally. They kissed, at first gently, then more passionately until her eyes closed and she felt her body beginning to respond.

"Clare," he whispered and ruffled her hair with his fingers "Clare, I wish I thought I had the right to ask you to marry me "

"Why haven't you?" she asked

"You can't be blind to this " he touched his face.

"Rubbish! That's superficial. There's something much more important in what *I* see And in what I feel It flows from here . " she touched her heart, "to here ." she touched his. "Darling Colin, I assure you I wouldn't care at all if you'd never been through Sir Arthur's hands and if you were still just as much of a wreck as you were a year ago. It's only for your sake that I'm glad Sir Arthur has been so successful And don't forget that before he's finished, he's promised that you're going to be even better-looking than you are today. And oh Colin, *dearest*, you don't really know me yet I've never been one to go mad over good-looking men I think love should be much deeper and mean much more than physical attraction "

"It does," he said in a low voice. But when with a forefinger he traced the contours of her face and touched the red-gold silk of her hair, he sighed and added· "You're so wonderfully beautiful. I haven't the right to ask you to be my wife."

"If you won't marry me, I'll never marry anyone," she cried decisively "I've waited all my life for you, Colin. I couldn't bear to lose you now I've never been in love before, darling, but now I understand what it means, I have no pride If you won't ask me to marry you, I will ask you."

He tightened his hold of her and said huskily:

"Oh, Clare, my dearest, my darling "

She hid her face against his shoulder. "I love you, Colin, with all my heart."

But even as she said the words the memory of the past smote her like a physical blow. She felt suddenly sick with the old shameful fear. Supposing when it came to their marriage she should feel the same horror and revulsion that she had experienced with Robin—with the others?

"Darling, you're trembling," said Colin.

She shook her head and tightened her arms around him She was afraid to let him know what lay in her mind

I didn't really love the others, she thought, *it will be different with Colin.*

But she couldn't be sure. Colin was obsessed about his disfigurement If she rejected *him* as she had done Robin, he might misconstrue it and it could have terrible results She must warn him somehow.

He made her look at him now

"Are you regretting already that you said 'yes', darling? Be frank with me. I can take the truth, For God's sake don't marry me out of pity."

She denied this violently.

"Pity is the last thing I feel. Respect, admiration, love, but not pity."

He began to laugh and covered her face with kisses

"All right, all right, darling I believe you But something's worrying you."

"It's something quite different," she said wildly. "I don't suppose you will understand but things have happened in my life that have made me doubt my capacity to love."

He held her close and stroked her hair

"Tell me, my darling. Tell me I'll try to understand"

Words poured from her in a torrent now. She told him about Robin and that night in the flat, about Jacques and how desperately anxious she had been in those days to prove that she could give herself in a normal way to love and to desire, to a man who wanted her Now she was afraid that she might let *him* down. She wouldn't have that happen for anything in the world

"You see, I love you more deeply and truly Of that one thing I am sure But I want to be able to love you physically, *wholly*. In this moment I feel that I could, I do. But supposing . . . oh Colin, I'm so terrified!"

He went on holding her, soothing her, his eyes grave but tender It was as though their positions were suddenly reversed. He, now, was the nurse She was the patient For the first time in their relationship he felt protective towards her He felt that he understood her past difficulties. He wanted so much to give her peace of mind now He was positive that all would be well but he knew, too, that it was essential for him to deal with all her complexities with the utmost tact and patience

"Have you ever been to a psychiatrist, darling?" he asked gently

She nodded and told him about the woman doctor who had once helped her.

"She said I would be all right once I fell in love. I expect I'm stupid and over-anxious," she ended, "but I do so want things to be perfect for us."

"Don't think about it now, darling," he said. "We'll find what we need in each other"

"I *have* found all I need in you, Colin."

She put up a hand and touched his cheek. In that moment, his heart twisted and his body thrilled with a totally unexpected desire; an urgent physical need of her. He had thought that sort of feeling had gone forever after Evelyn died He had never expected that he would want any woman again with the same almost uncontrollable passion. But he knew that he must keep his head

He released her, keeping a hold only of that lovely hand which he repeatedly kissed.

"It's going to be all right, Clare," he said quietly "Just don't let's rush things We needn't even become engaged if you don't want to Think it all over I want you to"

Then it was her turn to experience a joyous discovery of herself and of the effect that Colin had on her Because he had drawn away, she realised in that split second the awfulness of losing him again—and of her ardent wish to keep this new and almost terrible happiness

It was she who moved close to him and pulled him down to her breast Taking his face between her hands, she kissed him hungrily and passionately on his scarred mouth

"I love you, *I love you, Colin,*" she said

He caught fire from her and they clung together. For

them both, the green and golden world up there on the sunlit Downs revolved. Time shuddered and stood still.

They kissed lingeringly. Clare found herself able to surrender almost completely to the call of the blood that now moved hotly through her veins. She wanted to give herself to Colin. She trusted him. She believed, in that moment that she would find nothing but joy in their ultimate union.

Now, at last, she felt she understood the power of the love that had made her mother leave everything for the man she loved. She moved nearer Colin but he, with perception and sensibility, did not take advantage of the moment He was aware that he must be controlled. Patience—diplomacy in love—were the things he must show to this girl who was bringing back all the joy of living to his shattered life.

When finally she sat up and they lit cigarettes and talked together calmly, Clare said.

"You're being wonderful to me, Colin."

"I happen to love you very much."

"And I do love you. I swear it."

"You think when we eventually have breakfast together, you wouldn't mind seeing this ugly mug of mine—" he grinned at her— "it wouldn't spoil your meal? I must say when I'm shaving myself and look in the mirror it makes me feel a bit sick"

"Don't start that again!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing, "You know perfectly well that I don't notice anything wrong with your face To me you're absolutely normal. If only I could be sure that *I* was!" she added in a low voice.

"I've no doubts about you, darling," he said quietly

She put her folded arms on his knees and laid her forehead on them

"That's a wonderful thing to say. It makes me feel very good. You give me back my self-confidence"

"If you'll trust me, Clare, I think I can make you entirely happy."

She looked up at him, her eyes brimming with tears.

"I couldn't manage my life without you now—I'm sure I couldn't"

"Then shall we have a try? Shall we go and tell your Mother and Father the news, then ask the Vicar to put the banns up in Swanningdean Church?"

"Yes," she whispered

He drew a long breath.

"I think Evelyn would be pleased"

"I think so, too, Colin As far as she was capable of love—she did love you"

"It's sweet of you to say that, and I like to think you're right. And this is the last time we'll discuss her. But you're a different person from Evelyn Everything with you is going to be different You've been everything to me—my nurse, my friend—and now my Love. It's going to be a wonderful marriage, Clare."

"Yes, it's going to be wonderful"

But in that moment she sent up a small, desperate prayer. "Let it be right this time Let it be as wonderful as we both want. *Let it be,* please God."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

CLARE STOOD at the open window looking across the river at the dazzling sight of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre outlined against the bright blue sky.

An hour ago, she and Colin had finished their coffee in the oak-beamed lounge of the Avon Arms The Tudor inn used to be famous before the war for its food and wines and was struggling now to maintain its reputation despite the aftermath of war-time rationing

As had become his custom in the last ten days, Colin was having a night-cap and would join her presently in their bedroom. On the first night of her honeymoon, she had been grateful for his thoughtfulness in allowing her the privacy of their room in which to undress and had marvelled that he should be so sensitive to her feelings How stupidly afraid she had been that first evening! Looking back on it now, it seemed fantastic that she could have been so overwrought and tensed by the thought of his proximity

Lying in the big double bed, waiting for him to join her,

she had felt her whole body cold with fear as she had realized that time had run out on her and this was the moment when she must finally surrender herself to the will of the man she had married

She could smile now, with love and gratitude in her heart. How silly she had been not to realise that her beloved Colin would sense her fear, that he would be the last person in the world to force himself upon her unwanted. He had remained fully dressed for a while, lying down on the outside of the bed, an arm about her shoulders, his voice friendly and impersonal. He showed no particular strain or emotion but held her close for a few moments, caressing her hair, talking to her—obviously trying to put her at her ease Then he got off the bed, yawned, and said calmly:

"I'm tired—aren't you, poppet? Weddings are frightful affairs. It's always the poor bride and bridegroom who come out of 'em exhausted The glass is going up. Tomorrow we'll have a marvellous day. And they say it's going to be fine all week."

He had left her and taken his own bath, calling out to her occasionally, making friendly, ordinary remarks. She had argued with herself in the moments that followed alternating between despair and the longing to make him as happy as he deserved, when he came back to her. She wanted to give herself to him completely and to *trust* him. Had he not promised that between them things would be different? But the old, terrifying reluctance to submit wholly—to accept the ultimate expression of passionate love—gained the upper hand. When Colin did return from his bath she lay very still with her eyes shut and her teeth clenched, the sweat breaking out on her forehead.

He stood still an instant and looked down at her intently. Then he took off his dressing-gown and slipped into bed beside her

"Colin," she began in a choked voice. "Colin—I—"

He interrupted

"It's been a tiring day, my love Let's try to sleep."

For a moment she was amazed, but felt her muscles which had been so tense, relax, and when he drew her gently into his arms without making any attempt to caress her with passion, she was near to tears He was so sweet and understanding—he was so absolutely *wonderful.*

He stroked her hair for a moment and let his lips brush hers in a sweet and tender way. Then he kissed her throat and drew away, keeping an arm lightly across her

"Good night, my dearest love," he said.

She seized the hand that touched her waist and pressed her lips to it, gratefully The tears were actually trickling down her cheeks now.

"I love you so much," she said in a choked voice. "You're so terribly good to me"

"I just love you, my darling," he said "Sleep well."

She was amazed to find that she could do this—and that he, too, fell asleep So, like two children they lay there beside each other all through the night, just very near, yet passionless, peaceful, secure in each other's intimate presence

When morning came she opened her eyes to see the sun streaming into the bedroom Colin was already up She could hear him whistling gaily in the bathroom When he came out, he was freshly shaved He grinned at her, then leaned down and kissed her as though they were an old married couple—very much used to each other. Certainly he made her feel that he was no stranger here in her bedroom He said.

"Good morning, my dearest dear"

They breakfasted together, chattering, laughing, completely relaxed . . .

For a few days she felt only gratitude and relief but this had given way to concern for him and through the long nights, she lay wakeful arguing with herself as to what she should do about the situation He had been so completely wonderful to her that she *wanted* to offer herself to him and yet realized that this was not the complete wholehearted surrender she had envisaged for their honeymoon

Close on the heels of concern came doubts—was it possible that he did not want her? She had been absolutely certain before their wedding that he was as much in love with her physically as mentally, but now she asked herself if at the eleventh hour he had discovered that the memory of Evelyn was not as completely obliterated as he believed?

In every other way Colin had proved himself the perfect husband He could not do enough for her and did not seem able to bear her out of his sight It was only at night that

she felt alienated from him, the more so for having all day been his much-loved, cherished companion.

Perhaps most of all Clare disliked the thought of the alternative reason for leaving their marriage unconsummated—that Colin, over-sensitive and conscious of his scarred face, might believe himself physically unacceptable to her. If only they could discuss it openly! They had merely touched upon the subject of sex that day when she had first discovered she was in love with him and until now, Colin had behaved as if there were no problems. How long could they go on like this—with this strange, unnatural, unmentioned barrier between them?

She moved away from the window where the night air had begun to touch her fevered body with cool, damp fingers She felt strangely ill at ease and alone. She wanted Colin. She wanted the reassurance of his warm, loving smile and quiet voice. At the same time, she felt that her present mood of anxiety was one which she must battle with alone. She sat down at the dressing-table and took from the centre drawer the copies of the wedding photographs her mother had forwarded to her

How tall and handsome Colin looked! The photographs did not reveal the scars on his face As he stood looking down at her with that special tender smile of his, he seemed to be ten years younger than the Colin she had first met two years ago in her hospital ward

She was wearing an elegant white suit and her small white hat had a floating veil which was blowing in the slight summer breeze

She took up another photograph portraying some of their many friends outside the little church at Swanningdean. Some of the men were still in uniform and she could recognize one or two V A D nurses and sisters from her hospital What a wonderful, unbelievably happy day it had been! One or two incidents stood out especially—the moment of tenderness and new understanding when her mother had walked into her bedroom with her breakfast tray and kissed her:

"I've been awake all night thinking about you, my darling. I do so want you to be happy," she had said.

Clare had kissed her back and answered:

"I know I shall be. Don't worry about me, Mummy."

The moment when little Johnnie had toddled in and sat on her bed and she had played with his red curls and patted his sun-browned face and thought sadly about her half-sister *Poor Gloria She had missed this sort of wedding, this* sort of happiness that Clare was about to experience. She pitied Gloria deeply

There was the moment, too, when she drove with her father to the church He looked serious, and strangely sad.

"Smile, Daddy," Clare had coaxed. "Don't look as though you're going to a funeral"

"Nay, lass," he had said, his lips relaxing into a smile, "but I'm losing my daughter Your mother and I have had you for a long while. The house will be strange without you"

"But I've been away a lot during the war," she reminded him. "And you've got Johnnie"

"Ay, the little rascal's a great pleasure to us."

"You do like Colin, don't you?"

"Ay, he's a great chap Be good to him He deserves it"

She remembered that.

The moment when she placed her hand in Colin's and felt herself go suddenly cold, almost rigid with fear A fear not only for herself, but for Colin in case she should disappoint him. She could not bear to hurt him.

The moment when he had put the ring on her finger and whispered:

"*It's all right I'm going to make it all right . . .*"

But he hadn't, he hadn't . .

Clare put the photographs back in the drawer, and went across the room to open a suit-case From a pocket in the moiré lining she took out a letter. Her mother had slipped it in amongst her trousseau so that she should find it when she unpacked Clare read it for the third time

My darling,

You and I have never been able to talk to each other very intimately because we have never until recently seen eye-to-eye about the intimate side of life. And even now when you're going to be married we haven't touched on that side of things I haven't attempted to try and tell my daughter "the facts of life". She knows about them, bless her. But there is so much she doesn't know and it is that I still worry about.

I really know you love Colin. I'm not surprised, because he's a very special person. It isn't often one meets such a young man with what is called such "an old soul". He has an extraordinary perception and sensibility which leads me to believe that he will be a wonderful husband for you. But I worry about your attitude to loving.

I want you to read this after you reach your honeymoon hotel and try to understand at last all that I have told you so many times about my life with Father. I want you to learn for yourself that there is only one way in which a woman can really be happy—that is if she gives herself completely and wholly to love. Perfect fulfilment can never be attained without this complete giving Not only with a kiss, a word, a touch, but with the whole mind, the whole heart. A subjugation of self. A one hundred per cent surrender.

If you do not, you will never find the divine happiness that I found, first up at Wragby then down South, with your dear father.

Give yourself to Colin like this, Clare. I know you will never regret it. I shall be thinking of you and I send you all my prayers, such as they are, and all my wishes, that you may find perfect happiness and fulfilment.

Your Mother

Clare let the letter drop from her fingers. She lit a cigarette and began to smoke. She knew that her mother was right, yet could not understand how to deal with the situation.

She tried to stop thinking, and climbing into bed turned her face to the pillow. But thoughts would not be dismissed.

Perfect fulfilment can never be attained without this complete giving. That line stood out among all the others in Connie's letter to her daughter.

Up there in that little hut at Wragby, mused Clare, *Mother* had given and her father had taken.

Was this the thing Colin was waiting for? Did he want *her* to make the first gesture?

Then a light seemed to break over Clare. A light that spread from her mind right through her body until, from head to toe, she was warm and radiant.

When Colin finally came to bed, she was sitting up with her book open on her lap and a little secret smile on her lips. He attached no particular importance to the smile. He looked hard at her—as always, shaken by the glamour of the long red hair falling around her white shoulders, and the beauty of her eyes which looked at him with such gentleness.

"I love you, darling," he said, as he so often did.

"And I love you, Colin."

He kissed her lightly and settled down to sleep.

But this night was not as other nights. Clare could not sleep. She lay in the dark, her heart beating She kept remembering the words her mother had written to her:

"Complete giving . . . complete giving."

She pictured Colin, lying in the darkness, and thought of his scarred, kindly face—and of the sadness that sometimes lay behind those scars; and of his infinite goodness to *her*

Sensing her wakefulness, he sat up, switched on the table-lamp and turned towards her inquiringly.

"Is anything wrong, dearest?"

She leant over suddenly and kissed him on the mouth This was not her usual quiet responsive kiss. Now she was once again the Clare who had clung to him the day on the Downs when she first told him she loved him.

Night after night he had lain beside her, feigning sleep, battling with his desires, knowing that he must not approach her. He could not have said why such restraint was necessary but sensed deep down within him that if he could only be patient, she would in time find her own way to him.

Night after night, he'd been near to weakening in his resolve, knowing that Clare would be generous and give herself to him to satisfy his need. But his love for her, far surpassing the mere passion of the senses he had mistakenly called love when he married Evelyn, was greater than any selfish desire to possess her. A few moments of gratification was not worth the possible loss of her trust and that confidence. He had vowed on their wedding day that he would "make it all come right" and he knew that it would do so if he could only wait

He felt all the grace and sweetness of her long lovely

body pressing against him and knew that at last the moment had come He heard her voice—a mere breath of words against his lips:

". . . I've been afraid . . . but it's all right now . . ."

He felt his heart racing

"It's not just for my sake?"

But he need not have asked—there was no hint of pity about her.

"I love you, Colin. I love you, love you, love you. . ."

His sensitive fingers untied the blue ribbons of her nightgown He pulled it gently down over her shoulders and kissed them; then buried his scarred face against the white beauty of her breasts.

"I won't be frightened—this is Colin, Colin whom I love with all my heart."

Clare shut her eyes There was no time now for thinking, wondering, doubting It was too late to turn back. Then thought ceased as love lifted her into a new world, a new deep understanding, a new life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WHEN CONNIE left the night-nursery, Johnnie was sucking his thumb, drowsy and happy She joined her husband in the kitchen where he was taking off his boots.

"No sign of Colin and Clare yet?"

Oliver shook his head and gave his wife a wry smile

"Can't wait to see if the lass has come through her ordeal?" he teased her.

Connie relaxed and smiled back at him.

"*You* haven't done much worrying I've had to do it for both of us."

Oliver sat down in the wicker chair and stretched his legs out in front of him, with a sigh that was half weary, half contented

"Colin's a good chap He'll know the right way wi' oor lass."

"I hope so. I do hope so." Connie went over to him and kissed the top of his head where the hair was thinning. "Their honeymoon lasted only a fortnight. Ours has lasted twenty-two years."

"It's been good, Connie love hasn't it?"

"Much more than that. I hope it's been the same for Clare."

Connie would not have worried could she have seen Clare's face as Colin turned off the London road towards Swanningdean Her hand was resting on Colin's knee

"If we weren't late already, I'd stop this car and make love to you," he said.

He glanced briefly at his young wife, knowing that he would see the faint colour flare into her cheeks and that half-shy, half-adoring look in her eyes which he found so attractive.

Even now, he was not quite used to the idea that she was completely his His joy in her increased each day, each night they spent in one another's arms. He knew that Clare in her innocence believed that they had found the ultimate in their physical delight in one another. But he knew, too, that she was only just beginning to emerge from the painful inhibitions of the past It did not detract in any way from this wonderful feeling of unity between them. As time passed, he was sure the last of her fears would dissolve in the warmth of their love for each other. He was glad that they had found one another before Clare had learned the distressing news of Sir Clifford's sudden death There had been, he knew, a strange bond between her and Clifford Chatterley. Despite the fact that they had virtually only a brief period of time in each other's company, each had done something for the other Clare had somehow managed to erase the last traces of bitterness the man had undoubtedly felt towards her mother. He, in turn, had helped Clare over a difficult period of her life, enriching it at a time when she was badly in need of some fresh interest in her life

As so happened between them of late, Clare's mind was following his own train of thought.

"I know I didn't see a great deal of Sir Clifford, yet I miss him," she said suddenly "I still can't believe that he left Wragby Hall to us, Colin"

"To you, darling," he corrected her.

Connie's eyes stung with unexpected tears. There had been so many difficult moments when she and her daughter had seemed completely out of touch—almost strangers. Now, suddenly, they were friends.

Clare hadn't meant to tell her mother at once of Sir Clifford's Will. Connie was, of course, aware that he was dead, for Clare had telephoned her immediately she received the news from his solicitors. But now, Clare too, felt the closeness of this moment between them and she said, gently.

"The reason we didn't come down last week was that we went to Sir Clifford's funeral."

Connie nodded.

"I thought that might be it. I sent some flowers. I'm glad you went, darling. I think he was very fond of you, wasn't he?"

"Perhaps more so than any of us realized—he's made me his heir, Mummy. He's left Wragby Hall and everything that goes with it, to me."

Connie sat down suddenly in the wicker chair and stared up at her daughter, too stunned to reply.

"I do hope you don't mind too much. I don't think he wanted to hurt you or father. I think it was partly because he was so taken with Colin's suggestions for Wragby. It's terrible that he shouldn't have lived to see them come to fruition but we want to do it for him, Colin and I."

Silence fell for a moment. They could hear the sound of the two men talking as they came up the garden path with the suitcases.

"You mean," said Connie, "that you and Colin will *live there*?"

"Yes! Colin has put our mews cottage up for sale, and the moment its off our hands we're moving into Sir Clifford's wing. Then we'll be on the spot to plan the alterations ready for when the Red Cross move out, although that probably won't be for another year."

Connie's mind winged up to the home she had shared with Clifford Chatterley when she was a girl . . . to the little gamekeepers' hut which had been burned down . . . to the overwhelming passion for Oliver that had altered her whole life.

As Lady Chatterley she had been a failure. She and